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Part I

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by JACKSON GREGORY

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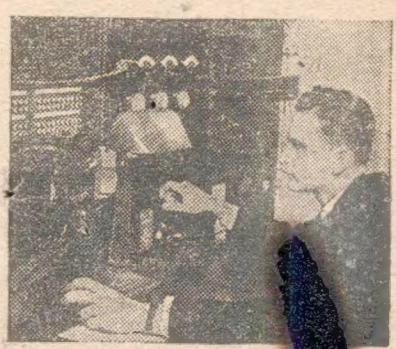

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IN the next SHORT STORIES there is a novelette of Frank Gruber's—that's good news in itself—and good news that it has to do with that flamboyant character Mr. Szabo, who says himself that he is a citizen of six countries—and can't enter but one of them. That one happens to be the U. S. A. and the particular spot in which he turns up is Bluff City. Bluff City, says Mr. Gruber, is really Butte, Montana, of the early days, and he further declares that all the most fantastic episodes in his yarn are actual happenings of Butte. Thereby, we take it, Mr. Gruber is warding off any reader who is going to invest in a postage stamp to let us know that he doesn't believe this or that in the new story. Primed by Mr. Gruber's letter, we undertook to believe all the happenings in the story—even those having to do with billion dollar hills, not to mention million dollar mines. Several fortunes had already been taken out the hills about Bluff City, fortunes of gold and silver, before Mr. Gruber's wandering Hungarian—or what have you—joined up with a couple of men interested in the next wealth to come from them thar hills—copper. He calls his story *"King Copper,"* and certainly whether or not you *do* find some of the episodes of the story, well—a bit uproarious, we can assure you you'll find it a good one.

* * * * * * * *

Patrick O'Keeffe has written quite a few stories for us in the past. They have dealt with the sea for the most part—and often with that part of seafaring life having to do with ship's radio and its operators, that being Mr. O'Keeffe job—but a story of his in the next issue is something else again. He explains the change in setting by saying that the plot of the story is written up from one supplied by a friend of his, and it has to do with counterfeiting, of all things. No G-Man tale, either, but an amazing yarn of India where counterfeit notes appeared, to puzzle local authorities and later Scotland Yard. The story in the next SHORT STORIES is called *"The Female Spider of Serampore."*

* * * * * * * *

Ever hear of a guy who held the wing of an airplane up by hand? Well, there is one such in an extraordinarily good Caffrey novelette in the next issue—*"No More Crashes."*

Coming up in the next issue

WILD RIVER O'HARA

PART I

by

JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "Marshal of Sundown," "High Hand at Rocky Bend," etc.

I

HIS name, if you want the whole of it, was Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara. Another thing, his string of names to the contrary notwithstanding, this O'Hara was richly American. To be sure though, the first ancestral O'Hara, of whom he had any knowledge, had come from a certain faraway emerald isle, and in his travels that first wild Tim O'Hara had tarried tempestuously in Spain and then had run off with a daughter of the Spanish dons.

Nonetheless our Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara, mostly known as Tony, was all Southwestern American, while there resided in that mercuric soul of his a lot of accumulated madness from two sufficiently mad races. Give a swaggering Irish lad a tumultuous Spanish girl for a bride, and what is the likely result?

The answer is: Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara. Tony for short.

II

THIS Tony O'Hara on a fine summer afternoon took a deep dive. Clad in a brief pair of trunks and a thick thatch of red hair that was so dark as to be almost black, he split the racing water of Wild River from a thirty-foot-high bank. And he said to himself as he shot down like a brown arrow that he didn't care a tinker's dam whether he ever came up or stayed down for good and all.

He dived deep, having selected a deep pool under a waterfall, but he broke the troubled surface, coming up, and shook his stubborn head and struck downstream swimming strongly.

"Downstream," he snorted to his best friend and worst enemy, none other than Tony O'Hara himself. "Symbolic stuff? Well, here goes."

He was young and strong and as bitter as gar-broth, a hard man ready to go to hell in a wheelbarrow, with no illusions left — and young O'Hara not yet even twenty-five years old!

That was because, young as he was and tough as he was, life had hammered him with brutal iron-knuckled fists; because he had suffered almost to the break of all endurance; because he couldn't somehow come to feel, as before now he had felt all his life, that this was the best of all possible worlds.

To him the world had grown to be

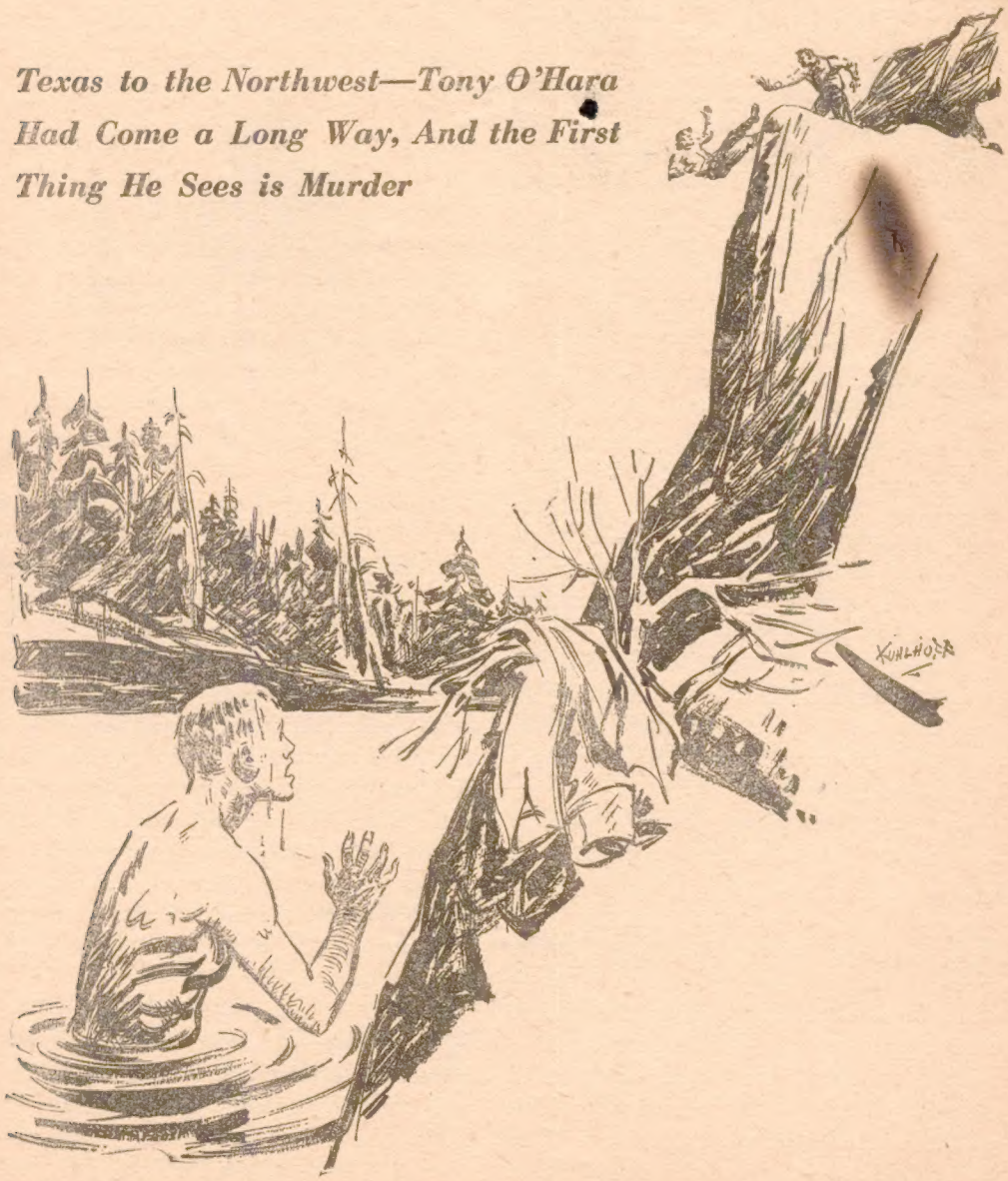
a snare and a delusion, a bitter place, a place of trickery and false dealing. Latterly he had gotten into the way of calling it a damn trap.

With his head tipped aside as he swam he saw his new wilderness home slide away behind him, the stately mountains heavy with timber throwing off their harshness with purpling veils of distance, surrendering some part of their majesty, growing almost soft and tender like any rugged landscape seen through the wrong end of a telescope.

He made great speed, arrowing along with the current, and was physically invigorated.

Headlong himself—he was like an arrow from a strong bow—he and Wild River were two of a kind. The river was a genial companion, going his way in his own style; shooting straight at its mark; it was all about him like a strong male friendship;

Texas to the Northwest—Tony O'Hara Had Come a Long Way, And the First Thing He Sees is Murder



it was a jolly old boy; it sang in his ears and chuckled, and as much as shouted at him, "Here we go, Tony O'Hara!" And then of a sudden the river was a treacherous beast of a thing; it kept on laughing and shouting out its song—and did its devilish best to smash his lean brown body against a submerged rock.

In the nick of time O'Hara saw the swirling white froth of water. He struck out with all his might to swerve about the hidden boulder, and just managed to slide by with no worse than a bruised thigh. He muttered disgustedly:

"Old Man River, so you're just like everybody else, are you? Gouge a man when you can, and consider it a good day's work. Hell take you, I'll ride along with you for a while yet, and what's more you'll do most of the work carrying me! Laugh that off, you chuckling devil!"

So he fought with Wild River, and of a sudden it dawned on him that in so far as he was concerned there was nothing in life worth while but to battle. A zest came back to him, and there had been no zest with its uplift and exhilarating swing for what seemed to him a million years. Let the other things go; let slip faith in his fellow man, if that had to go, and old loyalties and sentimental beliefs; let everything go to the dogs, you still had battle.

"Dammit," said young O'Hara as he swept downward through rapids, doing all any man could to dodge sudden death, "let's fight it out if it takes ten seconds or a hundred years."

And that was because, down on his back as he was, he was a hard man to keep down.

MURDER—he saw it committed before he was in the river twenty minutes—was one of the facts of life. Grim, ugly stuff it was—murder—and sweeping along with the stream he admitted the fact to himself, yet tried to heave himself up high enough to see what was happening. The black cliffs stood tall, perhaps three or four or five hundred feet above the madly running water; he was taking chances, ten to a minute, of a sort that most men don't care to take two in a lifetime; he saw, out of the edge of an eye, what happened.

Up there on the cliff those hundreds of feet above him, were two men. First glimpsed, they seemed to be talking idly, amicably. Then one pointed, stretching his arm out, and O'Hara saw that. Then maybe he batted an eye or shook his stubborn head to swish the water out of his hard blue eyes. But anyhow he saw the rest; a man had pointed and his companion had

looked, turning his back, and the man who had pointed shoved the other man over the cliff.

The man hurtling downward for the last long drop writhed and twisted in midair, and doubtless screamed; one could hear nothing above the insane shouting laughter of Wild River who had seen lots of things. The writhing body struck against an outcropping; it hung there the briefest part of a second; it rolled and flew wide of any hand-grip and dropped again; and it didn't any longer look like a man but like a clumsily made rag doll rather. Then it fell and struck and went down again.

And atop the cliff the man, a dim figure, who had catapulted his companion down to a certain death, turned and fled. Like Cain, he was.

YOUNG O'Hara was caught in the current. It laughed at him and his battling, and bore him along downstream. But O'Hara, a very determined young man when he had anything that made him feel

like being determined about, savagely fought the current and after a while won his way to shore.

He thought: Here I've been thinking about myself, just me; and there happen to be other poor devils in this loco world, and things are happening to them, too. Me, I want to know about all this.

Crawling out of the river, not without difficulty, his body beginning to mottle with bruises, he ran up along the bank to where the man who had plunged down from the cliff-top lay in a huddled heap.

Dead, that's what he was, thought Tony O'Hara. Sure, he had to be dead.

But he wasn't! Dying, yes; there was no doubting that. The dying man, a young fellow with a narrow face and narrow eyes and the pallor of the cities stamped on him, was as good as dead, though the life-spark burned on a brief while. O'Hara, stooping over him, thought, a candle, if I lighted it now, would last a lot longer than he's going to last. A match, even, might do better than he can do.

He was altogether right; the fox-faced murdered man had fewer mortal minutes left than he could count on the fingers of one hand. A moment ago he had been full of life, swollen with evil intent, and now he was the same as dead. The same as dead save for the last flicker of life's flame of which he knew nothing, over which he had no control.

A weak man in life, he was a weak man dying—and babbled with his last breath. Dripping young O'Hara stooped close over him and tried to make out what the muted babblings were all about.

HE HEARD such mutterings as, "She's a sort of queen—that's what she is. She's like Cinderella; of course! And me—I'll be Prince Charming—and I'll take all the millions!"

The dying man tried to laugh and his jaws locked and he died.

And Tony O'Hara hunkered down over him and considered. He looked at the dead man and turned away from him, not liking the look of him either dead or alive. Then he lifted his eyes to the high cliff above, taking frowning stock of its heighth and contours, judging that it would be no end of a job to climb up there. Easy enough to come down, as he had just seen! But virtually an insurmountable wall.

"And I'd like to get my hands on the dirty devil that shoved this chap overboard," he muttered.

Altogether he experienced a queer and compelling sensation that jerked him out of himself and his own personal problems, squatting there with a dead man within inches of him, visualizing another man scurrying away up there among the big-boled yellow pines; pondering on how he had just seen cowardly and cold-blooded murder done and could have no hope of even coming up with the murderer.

He drew his upward gaze back to what lay nearer at hand, staring down at the battered body broken among the rocks. His shoulders twitched with distaste as he fingered through the dead man's pockets. He meant to report the murder with what scanty details he could give; he'd have to say, "I saw one man shove another over the cliff." And it might help if he could add something about the murdered man's identity. Maybe he wouldn't even have thought of this had he not seen a folded sheet of paper, a letter no doubt, halfway out of a torn coat pocket.

It was dusky down there in the deep canyon, and the mosquitoes were out in hungry droves, and he kept slapping at them while he made his investigations. The paper was not a letter at all; on it were set down a lot of figures some of which appeared to indicate very large amounts of money, some he took to be annual dates. There were numerals like 1882, 1893, 1897. They told him nothing.

He kept on hunting. In a worn leather purse were a few coins; several silver dollars and a few two-bit and four-bit pieces. Also, in a separate compartment, were half

a dozen business cards. They were all the same in legend: "George H. Bromeley." the lower left hand corner was the address, Community Building, San Francisco, Cal. In the lower right hand corner, Spaulding, Hunter & King, Attorneys.

There was nothing further to help. So Tony O'Hara said to himself, "I guess he's George Bromeley from San Francisco, a lawyer or lawyer's clerk or something from Spaulding, Hunter & King—a long way from home, and not particularly any of my business. From the look of him, he had this coming to him."

He shoved purse and memorandum back into the dead man's pockets just as he had found them, and stood up. Again he craned his neck to stare at the cliff top. It was his job, he supposed, to find a way up there, to see whether there was a house or a camp or even a cross-roads town within eyeshot, and to tell what he knew.

"It's going to be the devil's own job," grunted young O'Hara, "but the devil's been handing me jobs aplenty of late and here goes. If I slip and come bouncing down who's going to give a single damn? Here we go, Mr. O'Hara."

BAREFOOTED, bare bodied, save for a pair of trunks not much better than a South African savage's g-string, he found it both hazardous and tortuous going to make his clambering way up to the cliff top. Even before starting the upward climb he had bruised his feet among the riverside rocks, seeking for something like a half mile for a place where the rock wall seemed scalable. He clawed his way upward like a mountain cat and was in danger of falling more than once. When he pulled himself up the last few feet and flopped down panting for a moment's rest, his toes were bleeding and there was many a red scratch on his arms and chest.

Next he stood up and looked around. He had attained a level benchland, a place like a park with its wide-spaced yellow pines, tall, towering old fellows looming august and philosophical like the ancients they were, who could look down from the height of multiple years and remember killing winters and laughing springs and flaming autumns and hot summers which they made cool with their shade—who could stand unmoved on a day like this while one puny human life was blown out like a candle, and a murderous wretch could flee this way and that under their still branches, seeking a haven which perhaps he could never quite find.

"It's a funny old world," said O'Hara, become philosophical in the company of so many tall philosophers, "and it's hard as nails."

He went seeking the spot from which George Bromeley, conceding that to be the dead man's name, had fallen. He found it without trouble and read in the tracks there that Bromeley and the killer must have stood talking for some little time. He saw the faint woodsy trail which the two had trod to come to this lookout point. The trail wound this way and that under the pines, at times lost under thick brown needles, but he could see nothing to which it led. Not a house, not a cabin in sight, no smudge of smoke lifting above the pine tops.

This was virtually all new country to Tony O'Hara; he didn't even know where the next town was. He had been up this way—on the other side of Wild River though—seven years ago, but only for a few days. He had had money then, more money than a mule has oats, and had hunted and fished and had, just for fun, bought some ten thousand wild and profitless acres, and had pretty nearly forgotten everything, acres included. But all that lay across the river. Of this side he knew nothing at all.

So now, a stranger in a strange land, he looked whichever way he could through the twisted pines and asked himself what there was for him to do about this affair which certainly was none of his. Keep your long nose out of it, a small, still voice

advised. Yet a man didn't simply shrug his shoulders and go wandering off, leaving a newly dead man lying on top of the ground instead of snugly under it, without reporting to somebody what he knew.

Then, all of a sudden, giving him a start, he saw a girl peeking around the sturdy bole of one of the biggest pines.

"Holy Smoke!" muttered Tony O'Hara. "Do you suppose she was the one to shove him over?"

It was a girl all right. Dressed as she was, like a boy, overalls stuffed down into old lopsided boots, a floppy hat slammed on anyway on her curly head, ancient pull-on sweater and all, there was no likelihood of mistaking her for anything but what she was, just about the prettiest little girl Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara had ever seen. Every curve of her budding body spelled femininity. He stepped along toward her and she for an instant seemed about to whirl and run. But she didn't, whether because she knew he would run her down or because she was not averse to a word with him.

He towered above her. He looked down at her sweet slimness which all the rags in the world could never disguise; she looked straight up at him. Her eyes were big and blue, a deep, deep blue and as tender as the tenderest of western flowers, the Baby Blue Eyes peeping up out of spring grasses. Her mouth was red and pouting and kissable; she wore dimples as some women wear pearls.

She breathed the very essence of naive innocence; there was to her the look of a new born baby. She was as fresh and simple and childlike as— She was like newly fallen snow, like white rose petals. She was the sort of pristine thing that Eve must have been in that bright golden dawn when she met Adam.

She struck Tony O'Hara all of a heap. He had to take a deep breath before he could even say a word to so much artless loveliness all done up in one luscious package.

But eventually, contending with the spell of her big, sweet eyes turned up to him so trustfully, he asked:

"Just now did you see a man running from here? Dodging through the trees, going places?"

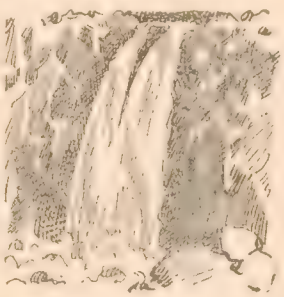
It seemed impossible that her eyes could widen further, yet they did. And they grew softer and sweeter, and her dimples started their little teasing tricks at the corners of her mouth, and she said in a voice as melliferous as melting honey, her first words to him:

"Hell, no, Mister. Me, I ain't saw nobody."

III

O'HARA— Well, you could have knocked him over with a sixteen pound sledge hammer. If ever a man had seen a young angel freshly dipped in morning dew, it was this youngster in the torn overalls and too-large boots and faded sweater—until she spoke! But it wasn't in the cards, he was sufficiently narrow-minded to think, that sweet young dewy angel, parting their ripe red lips in heavenly smiles, would tell you, "Hell, no, Mister!"

So for a queer long moment he didn't have anything to say.



Then he realized that she was studying him with about the same sort of wonder which he felt for her. She was looking him up and down, and for a wee thing like her that was quite a distance. Save for his trunks, mind you, he was like Adam the first minute in Eden. And it is not the expected thing of a green summer day

in the wilderness country to run into a young man clad like that. Small wonder she had peeked from behind her big yellow pine!

"Look here," said O'Hara. "Dammit!" said O'Hara, and scratched his blackish-red thatch. "I was going to say something and you scared it out of my head!"

She dimpled divinely. She said in that soft cooing voice of hers. "Aw, hell, Mister, I ain't scared a damn' thing out of you. You ain't the scareable kind, I bet a man."

"Do you mind telling me if I'm awake or asleep?" said O'Hara. "Do you mind letting me know if I was the one who fell over the cliff and either went dead or daffy?"

That made her laugh; she laughed gleefully, and it was all tinkling music as of little gold and silver bells chiming.

"Look here," he said, half angry. "Who are you and what are you and *why* are you anyhow?"

"Me, I'm Cinderella, of course. Who are you?"

"Me, I'm Tony O'Hara. But now you listen to me!" He grew emphatic, for after all there was that dead man to think of, a concrete thing not to forget for the first pretty girl. "Tell me something; where do you come from? Where's the nearest house?"

"Our house," she answered promptly. "It's right over yonder."

She pointed, but he couldn't see a thing save the pines and the sunlit lanes threading in a hundred ways among them.

"What do you mean our house? Who lives there?"

"I do. So does Klippy. So does Jed. That's us."

"Klippy? And Jed? Who are they anyhow? Your mama and papa, maybe?"

She giggled. And she said again:

"Hell no, Mister." He began to think that was her favorite string of words. She went on, bubbling over with laughter as he imagined she always was from dawn to bedtime, "They're Amos Klipton and Jed Towers, and they're aces, and friends of mine to boot. If you want to know some real folks, just you come along. Either one of them can shoot the eye out of a squirrel as far as you can see a dead pine on a hill top."

And all the while she kept looking at him as though she were drinking him in, as though she were thirsty and could never get enough of admiring him. It made him feel queerly uncomfortable; later he was to understand. But that was only after he came to know those two queer old birds, Jed Towers and Amos Klipton.

And while she stared, he did the same thing. Called herself Cinderella, did she? Well, the dead man down at the base of the cliff had babbled about some Cinderella.

"Look here, do you know a man named George Bromeley?" he said soberly.

"You can bet I do! I slapped his face for him good and hard this morning, Mister. He's a skunk."

"If you say so. But he's a dead skunk then."

He had to wonder whether there was any limit to that widening of her eyes.

"What are you driving at?" she demanded.

"He's the man I tried to tell you about. He's right down there, below us, at the bottom of the cliff. Dead as a door nail from the spill he took. Somebody shoved him over. Was it you?"

She shuddered.

"Me, I slapped him and I am—I mean I was — glad of it. But, hell, Mister, I wouldn't shove the goofy goat over."

"Who did then? Amos, maybe? Or Jed?"

"How would I know? Maybe. I wouldn't blame 'em, would you?"

"This thing has got to be reported to the authorities—"

SHE wrinkled up her smooth brow.

"'Authorities?' What does that mean? Who are they?"

"Sheriff. Constable. Somebody representing the law. By the way, where is the nearest town?"

"Down river about four mile," she told him.

"What town?"

"Old Riverton. But New Riverton's bigger, they say, and nicer, only it's fu'ther on, and it sets back fu'ther from the river and the main road."

"I'll go on to Old Riverton then. I'll report the thing there. While I do that you'd better hurry along to tell your friends, Klippy and Jed, what I've just told you. I saw somebody shove Bromeley over the cliff; that's all I know."

She invited, "You can come along with me, over to the house. Only Klip and Jed, they don't like men folks hanging around much; they'd just as lieve shoot a man, specially a young, good-looking one like you, as pull their boots off."

"Thanks," said O'Hara. "I'll be coming back. Now, I'd better move along."

"You dress kind of funny," said the girl.

"So do you," he retorted. "And you give yourself a funny name—Cinderella. It ought to be against the law!"

"Your name is just as funny as mine, Mister Tony O'Hara. Say! You're one of the Big O'Hara's, ain't you? One of Steam Roller O'Hara's tribe? Golly! I bet a man that Klippy and Jed would fill your hide full of buckshot, sure! When you come up this way again you better tell 'em you're Willie Smith or Tommy Brown or something."

"I never heard of any other O'Haras in this neck of the woods," O'Hara told her. "And when I come back, and that won't be long, I'll tell your Klippy and Jed that I'm Tony O'Hara, and if they don't like it they can take a long running jump over the cliff. Now I'm on my way. So long—Cinderella."

"So long, Mister O'Hara," she said. And then, dimpling at him and making her eyes big again, she said, "So long, Tony. And come back real soon."

For a moment their eyes clung; he had an impulse to step closer to her, but killed the impulse. He went back to the river, finding an easier descent. He figured that four miles downstream in the water was better than four miles barefooted on a mountain trail.

As he slid back into the strong, cool current he looked lingeringly over his shoulder and up to the cliff top. There she was. He waved; she waved; he struck out, swimming strongly, bound for Old Riverton. And as he swam, young O'Hara said to none other than young O'Hara himself:

"I don't believe she's real. She and her Klippy and Jed! But I bet I see her again real soon. A fellow doesn't find a Cinderella every day. And the millions that dying devil was babbling about! Oh, my eye, Charley!"

His were broken thoughts, swimming down to Old Riverton, for he couldn't more than get the teeth of his mind into a thought when he had to draw on all he had, mentally as well as physically, to dodge a whirlpool of white-frothed water and the hidden rock against which the fast-running current meant quite playfully to batter the life out of him. But in a long, fairly smooth stretch of glassy water where Wild River swept, curving majestically about the base of a gently sloping mountain, he thought:

Cinderella, is she? Knows Bromeley, but not well; just enough to know him for a skunk and to slap his face; not to blame anybody if Jed or Klippy killed him. And Bromeley was out for her millions! That's something to laugh about—or is it? Look here, Tony. Bromeley was tied up with a law firm in San Francisco. Just came up here; you could tell from the clothes of him and from the pale hide of him. Out here to grab her—to grab millions along with her! Suppose we look into this, Tony, old boy!"

The wide smooth arc of running water was trimmed at its lower end with rain-

bow spray shooting high in air; O'Hara made haste to swim ashore before he was pounded to death at a spot where Wild River cascaded down into a nest of boulders as ugly as so many black crocodiles. For a while he made his difficult way along the shore line, and began to go limpingly. He said, "Dammit" more than once. But he upgathered his train of thought again.

"Why not?" he wanted to know. Soured on life, still as bitter as gar-broth, he did all that any O'Hara could to feel mean and cynical. "Bromeley knew something. Maybe this Cinderella kid knows and maybe she doesn't. Who are Klippy and Jed anyhow? Why do they chase me off with shotguns? How come two old coots like them are close-herding a backwoods angel like her? If Bromeley came all the way from the coast to rob the nest— Well, Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara, why not you? To hell with the world; to hell with everything but a million dollars!"

The thought pleased him and he chuckled. His feet carried him mincingly along a few yards farther; again he slid into the water.

"How'm I ever going to get back?" he asked himself. "I'll be seven miles from home, barefooted and mostly naked—and the mosquitoes will be out for a party. I'll give you two to one that the biggest fool ever born was named O'Hara."

Just the same he kept on going. A thing about this O'Hara: He had been born and bred down in Texas, in a section of Texas where there was little water and no end of sand; where the air was dry as a blotter; and one of his very first loves was a picture, a seascope, by none other than Waugh which made its beautiful promises and tempting invitations through the laughter of deep, green, curling waters; and so, in a desert, he loved water. He went miles to the San Antonio River; he soaked himself in its liquidness; he taught himself to dive, to swim, to float in the pools like a god on clouds over Olympus. And now to slide downstream like a trout heartened him. Gloomster that he had been for weeks—a man, mind you, who was born for the sheer joy of life, but who had been twisted and warped by adversity into joy's antithesis —he grew exhilarated and expansive just because he was in the embrace of his dearly beloved element.

Still all the while he remained sinister and cynical, caustic and youthfully hard. He said, as he splashed along, "Dammit, that's what I'll do. They've robbed me, the robbers. Me, I'll try the same trick for once. Millions? A crazy dream that Bromeley had? Maybe. But maybe not. Lawyers don't dream, do they? They're too full of torts for that."

THE cliffs had lessened, softening down, behind him. To right and left were mountains melting down into hills; the stern masculinity of the more rugged country began now to merge with the gentler curves of a softer land. Then of a sudden, he found himself in a placid stream which widened and slipped along whisperingly, and saw ahead of him a golden glow where the lowering sun flashed on windows.

"Old Riverton?" he asked. "Must be. And me, won't I be a hell of a sight running in on the old town dressed like this, and with all my big toes stubbed and raw? And never a cent in my jeans, not having any jeans and likewise no sense, to buy a drink or a cup of coffee?— Let's go, O'Hara."

It wasn't Old Riverton at all.

It wasn't any town.

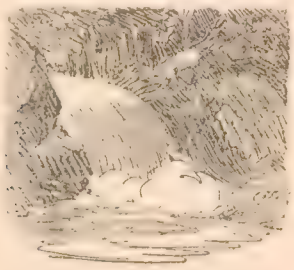
It was an amazing place. Here in the rugged wilderness were wide green lawns sweeping down a gentle slope to the river's edge. The river had been widened by the pressure of many thousands of dollars so that for a space it had to think of itself as a lake, as lazily untroubled as a midsummer's dream, as dimply as Cinderella herself. Actually there were swans, a dozen of them. And a couple of little boats, white with delicate blue trimmings. And of

course there was a pier like something made into actuality from a picture. And there was a springboard.

To make a man like Tony O'Hara suspect that he had bumped his head on a rock and gone dizzy, there was a girl on the diving board, a girl in the pinkest swimming suit that ever was, with her hands above her head, palms together, ready to take off in a dive.

As he crawled out of the stream, shaking himself to shed water, wiping the hair out of his eyes, shivering a bit, he marked the arc she made, as beautiful as a rainbow, cutting the water cleanly, vanishing like a snow flake that had melted.

He had been buffeted, slung this way and that by the strong currents, and so he squatted on the brief strip of artificial beach, hugging his knees, waiting to see just where she would come up.



This O'Hara had his fine qualities, but patience was not one of them. It wasn't long before he began gathering his heavy brows frowningly; he started stirring like the restless soul he was; he waited for as long as he could. Then, when the girl did not reappear, he ran along to the spot from which she had taken off, and went down in a sharp dive to look for her.

The water was as clear as glass and just here was a good twenty feet deep. He shot all the way down. He couldn't see her, couldn't see any sort of submerged trap that might have caught her. So he came up again, shook the water out of his eyes and looked for her on the bank. Then, when he could get no glimpse of that vivid pink suit of hers he dived the second time.

Under water he swam downstream with all the vigor that resided within him, and vigor chanced to be his middle name. At the lower end of the lake-like expansion of the river he saw a sunken log, water-soaked and jammed between rocks, and experienced a fearsome moment when he fancied she might have been caught in an undertow and held there by the transverse log and the swift current. But his lungs threatened to burst, and he had to come up for air.

And then he saw her sitting on the bank not ten feet from where he came up, and she was laughing at him.

"Now how in the devil!" O'Hara greeted her when he had got the air back into his lungs and the water out of his eyes.

She pointed while she kept on laughing. Around this lake of a thing willows grew; they trailed their supple branches down into the river. She had swum downstream a hundred yards, had crawled up under the willows, had watched in lazy summer amusement when he dived for her.

"Thanks just the same," she said gaily. "You were quite the hero."

O'Hara could have slapped her. Under water he had had time to think, "Am I to see two people go dead the same day? A weasel-faced shyster and a nice looking girl?"

For, no argument about it, she was nice looking. In other words, from top to toe, she was as pretty as a peach.

To her impish remark he made no rejoinder. First of all he was just beginning to breathe properly; next he felt like a fool; on top of all this he was shivering. Much as he loved the water he had had all of it he wanted today. He picked up a stone and somewhat viciously hurled it at a swan that looked altogether too cocky for any use.

THE girl giggled.

"At first I thought you were an alligator or something, splitting the water coming down this way headed in the gen-

eral direction of the Gulf and South America."

"You saw me? Then you dived and hid just for a silly joke?"

"I am exploding today with the sheer joy of being alive. Don't go spoil it all by being a crab."

He did his best to glare balefully at her.

"It's dangerous, don't you know it," he said, "swimming alone where swans are? The ugly beasts grab you and shove you under water and keep you there until you stop blowing bubbles. When you come up they tweak your nose and pick your eyes out."

"My, but you're a cheerful young man!" She studied him with frank interest. "Were you born that way, or did something get you down—the way you say a swan does?"

"Where is Old Riverton?" he asked. "How far?"

"If you had eyes in the back of your head you'd be looking in its general direction right now. It's over the ridge about three miles."

He winced and regarded his bare feet.

"Who lives here?"

"Who is it that wants to know?"

"I do."

"Oh." She had fished for his name, but if he wanted to be a clam as well as a crab she was darn sure she wouldn't fish again.

O'Hara glared at her and she gave him an exquisite view of the curve of her cheek and the pert sauciness of her nose.

"Dammit!" said O'Hara.

"Don't swear at me," said the girl. She jumped up and ran up to the springboard and was about to take off in another dive when he shouted at her and she stopped and regarded him from under slightly elevated brows.

"I've got to get word to Old Riverton. I haven't any clothes and I haven't any shoes and I'm hanged if I want to trudge like this three miles over a mountain. Have you anybody around the place you could send for me? Or, if not, can you lend me a horse?"

Up there above him she was doing her very excellent best to look haughty, but now a thought struck her and she giggled at him again.

"I'll get you a horse if I have to steal one! Then I thnk I'll get me one and follow along! Gee, you'll look funny riding like that into town. Boy, I bet you'll start a riot!"

"Lead me to the horse."

"You are quite welcome, I'm sure. But do you mind if I finish my swim first? Or is the world afire and are you rushing like Malise or Paul Revere or somebody to get the fire department?"

Again she poised for her dive and again he called sharply to her and she turned to him again.

He thought that never in his life had he encountered a chit of a girl who could further irritate an already irritated man the way this one did.

"It's a matter of considerable urgency—and you are not doing me any personal favor, because the thing is absolutely none of my business—but it happens that just now I saw a man take the long spill from the top of those high cliffs about four miles upriver. What's left of him is lying there now I suppose."

SHE stared a moment, then flashed down from her high place and came to him. She spoke excitedly, demanding, "Just where? Who was it? How did it happen? Tell me about it!"

He made a crisp, brief recital of the affair. She winced; a look of pain and of horror came into her eyes.

When he had finished, "You're a big, cold-blooded brute!" she flared out at him. "You just saw this happen and the way you talk about it— It's just like you were talking about the sort of weather we had last week! Haven't you *any* heart?"

"No. And I don't want any. And you haven't any either. You're just like everybody else. And now—"

"You are sure you saw somebody shove

the poor fellow over? He didn't just grow dizzy and fall? The edge of the cliff didn't just crumble—"

"A man doesn't need a mushy heart to have good eyesight. I saw somebody give him the shove that sent him down, spinning and twisting and grabbing at the air—"

"Don't!" She clapped her hands to her ears. "And you say it was near somebody's place? Whose? What kind of people——?"

"I've been up here all of two days," said O'Hara. "I don't know a soul."

"But you said there was a girl; who was she?"

"Cinderella," he said. "That's all I know. That's what she told me."

"What was she like?"

"Dressed pretty much in rags, man-style in overalls and old boots and sweater. And as pretty as the devil. Maybe she chews tobacco. She can say 'Hell, no, Mister!' like nobody's business."

The girl in the pink swimming suit sniffed and up went her nose.

"I've heard about her. She's some sort of a crazy, wild, mountain girl. She lives with two dirty old men. One of them, maybe the girl herself, must have killed him. That's the kind they are."

"She's a darn nice kid," said O'Hara partly to anger her, partly because he meant it. "The nicest I've seen in years. And by a long shot the prettiest."

The girl in the pink swimming suit, so utterly different from the little wild-woods girl, smiled a tight little superior smile; with that smile she dismissed Cinderella from all consideration.

"Let's hurry to the house," she said. "I suppose you had better go on into town and tell what you know. My brother is smaller than you, but maybe you can crowd into one of his suits."

SO THEY went up across the sloping lawn, the girl running ahead, O'Hara limping along in her wake. At the top of the lawn the trees came down, stalwart old pines and cedars commingled, and a crooked trail penetrated them, so for a moment O'Hara lost sight of the slim figure darting into the strip of forestland. He stepped along more swiftly to come up with her. Where the dim path angled acutely, not seeing her, he heard other steps than her light patter, and then a sort of gasp from someone and with that the thud of heavier footsteps. Seeing neither the girl nor the man who had met her, he heard their voices.

"Oh, my God, Molly!" It was a man's voice, high-pitched in excitement, shivering with an emotion which O'Hara instantly catalogued as fear. "Oh, Molly! For God's sake, help me. I—I have just— Oh, my God, I swear I didn't mean to—I have just killed a man!"

"Billy! Oh, Billy! No! You don't mean that—"

"It's God's truth. *And Carter Brill saw me do it!* Listen, Molly! It was like this—"

"Be still, Billy! Don't! Don't you say another word. Not now, Billy! There is someone—"

Then Tony O'Hara, coming around the crooked elbow of the trail, came up with them.

They stood silent, frightened, staring at him.

IV

"OH, I heard it all," said O'Hara. He glanced briefly at Billy, taking a snapshot mentally of a gangling overdressed youth of about Molly's age, perhaps even younger, with lack-luster eyes and a chin fading weakly down into his collar. "But it's none of my business. I—Say! This Billy Boy doesn't happen to be the brother you mentioned, does he?"

Molly put her arms about the slim, vapid-looking youth.

"Yes! He's my brother. Now what?"

"Just this," said O'Hara. "I'll ask you

for that horse and I'll ride into Old Riverton in my trunks. That's what. I'm not borrowing anybody's clothes today, and I'll thank you for the horse, and I'm in a hurry."

Billy, looking not only desperate and frightened, now looked mystified.

"Who's this man?" he demanded of his sister.

"I wouldn't know," said the girl. And then she started to cry, and next she got a grip on herself and said very coolly to O'Hara, "You can have the horse. I'll go with you to the stable."

After that she whispered something into her brother's ear and he, with terror in his eyes, stared at O'Hara a moment, then turned and hurried away toward the house. O'Hara could see it now, a monstrosity of a thing looking like a crazy man's dream of a castle. It was as big as all outdoors and was garnished with balconies and towers.

The girl watched her brother out of sight. Then, with head up and eyes changed from soft laughing loveliness to cold glowing gems, she led the way to the stable. It in itself was, on a slightly smaller scale, castle-like. A red-headed boy, looking as Irish as Paddy's pig, stood grinning in the stable door, hat off, waiting for orders.

"Saddle Lightfoot in a hurry," said Molly. "Hurry, I tell you."

The boy ran back into the stable.

The girl, chin still high up, confronted O'Hara.

"Well?" she demanded.

"I told you," he said curtly, "that all this affair of yours and your brother's is none of mine. I am riding along, I've got to admit, on another piece of business that nobody has asked me to step into—but it seems sort of forced on me. But as far as you and Billy go— Well, I'm leaving you alone. Do I have to tell you twice?"

"No." Then, after she was silent a little while, she said in a voice so very quiet that he could hardly hear the words, "Thank you."

Tony O'Hara in his scanty swimming trunks went up into the saddle like a squirrel up a tree and dug his bare heels in, and struck off toward Old Riverton with a rush, anxious to have this thing over with.

HE HAD a good if steep mountain road underfoot, and Lightfoot was a pure gleam of a horse, so he flung the three miles away behind him like tossing something over your shoulder. The pine forest was all about him as he rode, and the pines stood majestically tall all about the small clearing where Old Riverton hid itself like a bird in a nest.

A rather foul bird, by the way; a sort of evil bird of prey.

It was late afternoon when he clattered into Old Riverton's one street; it was close to sundown, and something like a score of men were scattered along the wooden sidewalk; there was one sidewalk, crazy and broken and sagging on one side of the road, only deep dust on the other.

There was plenty of dust in the middle of the road, too, and Tony O'Hara rode through a cloud of it. Still he drew attention, and at first men stared, then began laughing. In all their born days not a man of them had ever seen a rider come into town dressed—undressed, rather—like this fellow.

The laughter was impersonal and good-humored enough, still young O'Hara did not like the sting of it in his ears. He pulled his horse in abreast of three men, rough and tough by the look of them, and demanded:

"Where'll I find the sheriff? Or constable? Or somebody like that?"

The three stopped in their tracks and regarded him humorously. Their laughter was of the raucus and uncouth type; nothing subtle about it.

"Why, damn you!" cried O'Hara. "I just asked you a civil question. Will you answer it for me or stand there like three empty-headed jackasses?"

One of the three, a big man who looked to have been chopped out of a bit of knotty timber with a hand ax, put his hands on his hips and grinned with a big, yellow-bearded mouth.

"Hello, pardner," said the yellow-bearded giant. "You're drunk as a fiddler's bride, that's what you are. Better go sleep it off, you and your horse."

"You're a damn liar," said O'Hara.

"Call me a liar?" boomed the big man. "Just for that I'd rip you out of your skin!"

O'Hara came down out of the saddle like the wolf on the fold. He was bristling with anger, an anger which had ridden with him so much of the time from the moment he dived down into Wild River and which, all the afternoon's occurrences, had been ruffled rather than smoothed down.

"I call you a liar!" he said to the big gorilla-like man. "Want to do anything about it?"

"Like this," the other answered, and drove at O'Hara a hairy fist that looked like an oversized coconut.

Whereas when the fray started there could have been a mere twenty or thirty men straggling along the street, within virtually no time at all there must have been a hundred. For in a sleepily quiet town like Old Riverton in a drowsy afternoon sudden sharp sounds carry far and fast. Saloon doors had burst open and expectant observers poured forth, hoping for the best.

O'HARA was nimble on his feet and he was a lean tendon for sinewy strength and he was as quick of eye and as springy of muscle as a cat. So he made it his immediate affair to be somewhere else when the grizzly giant's fist whizzed in his general direction. And the big man, launching all he had, his burly bulk behind his drive, was for an instant unbalanced. That single instant was enough for his undoing. Tony O'Hara brought up a hard brown fist in a manner which smacked of the scientific; his knuckles took the big fellow under the ear—and the big man went down like an army mule shot through the heart.

There were yells, there were whoops of delight, there were raw words shouted of all sorts both pro and con. Some were delighted to see the thing happen the way it had happened; there were others of different mind. Of all their shouting O'Hara gleaned scarcely a word. What he was doing just then was keep an eye on the fallen giant's two companions.

They rushed him, the two together, with one mind. They were going to take him apart, to make mince meat of him in the shortest possible time. So he sprang across the sidewalk, getting his back against the wall of the Old Riverton General Mercantile Store, arranging matters so that they couldn't take him fore and aft at the same time. They'd have to come at him where he could see the two of them.

But before a blow was struck the big man whom he had knocked down came surging up to his feet.

"You boys keep out of this!" he roared. "It's my fight and this damn fools. Keep out, I tell you!"

He rushed at O'Hara a second time; he had blue eyes and blue fires seemed burning high and hot in them. The man must have stood six feet six inches in his socks, maybe an inch or two above that, and among most men was like a battleship among tugs. He could drive that fist of his through the panel of a door and think nothing of it. Now he whipped over a blow at O'Hara that was like the drive of a piston on one of those new steam engines which were pulling trains across the country.

But he was still a bit groggy from the blow he had just taken under the left ear, and O'Hara was alert on his toes. The giant's whiskery coconut of a fist merely grazed O'Hara's high cheek bone, leaving only a pinkish wake as its aftermath. Then O'Hara blazed out again with his answer, and his hard brown knuckles took his opponent square on the tip of his chin. The

funny thing, as most of the onlookers saw it was this: the big man's burly bulk was lifted clean off the sidewalk and then was slammed down flat on its back, and the thing was so neatly and prettily done that not a single man of them all did not feel a bit of pride in it, as though he himself had done the deed.

THERE was a pause. O'Hara was rather expectant of a general onslaught, thinking that this fellow's friends would rush him, a stranger, and beat him thoroughly.

But they only stood still, looking from him to the fallen man, waiting. Later he understood; twice he had floored Chuck Brand, and no man in Old Riverton had ever floored Chuck before. More than that Chuck, in whose voice was authority, had just said, "You boys keep out of it. It's my fight and this damn fool's."

The big man shook his head and pawed at his face and lumbered to his feet. For a moment he stood swaying slightly, blinking like a man who had just come out from a dark room into strong sunlight.

"Who'd you say you wanted?" he said. "The sheriff? Well, come along of me; I'll show you."

He slid his arm through O'Hara's and dragged him along.

"Look here—" said O'Hara.

"Look nothing," snorted the big man. "You want the sheriff; well, he's a friend of mine and I'll take you to him. Then I'll buy you a drink and a pair of pants. After that, if you feel mean and ugly, I'll knock hell out of you."

"That's fair enough," said O'Hara, and grinned. And the big man grinned too, and said:

"Me, I'm Arthur Brand. Chuck Brand for short."

"Me," said O'Hara, "I'm Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara. Tony for short."

They shook hands.

Chuck Brand led the way as straight as the shortest distance between two points to the Wide Open Saloon. There, in a back room, he barged in on five men playing poker. Chuck Brand crooked his finger at one of the five, a thick-bodied, hard-bitted man with a drooping brown mustache and extraordinarily piercing eyes, and the man, frowning, slid his chair back and got up and came forward, growling like a bear.

"Damn you, Chuck," he said. "Drunk again? What are you stirring me up for?" He glared briefly at O'Hara. "Want me to arrest this gink for indecent exposure?"

"Meet my friend Tony O'Hara," said Chuck. "He wants a word or two with you and he's in a hurry, being thirsty. Tony, meet Jim Bagley; he's sheriff."

"Put a name to it, O'Hara," said the sheriff.

"I'll make it snappy," said Tony O'Hara. And in a very few words he told all that he had meant to tell. He had seen a man shoved off over the cliffs a few miles upriver, where Amos Klipton and Jed Towers had some sort of a ranch. The dead man was named Bromeley, if you went by the cards in his wallet. And that, take it or leave it, was all that Tony O'Hara knew or cared.

The sheriff glared at him harder than ever.

"Dammit," he said. "Here I'm busy and have just steered into the first run of luck I've had for a month. And now you want me to go prowling out from hell to breakfast trying to find out who booted who over the cliff? Shucks."

"The man that got booted over was named Bromeley, I tell you," said O'Hara. "That's all I know. Ask me, from the looks of him I'd say he deserved it. It's up to you to do as you damn well please."

"You get fresh with me—" Sheriff Bagley began, when the yellow-bearded giant cut him down.

"He ain't being fresh, Brad," he said, "and you know it. Besides, like I told you, he's a friend of mine. Now suppose you finish your game and then go 'tend to your sheriffing duty. Come along, Tony. Me

and you for a good drink and a pair of britches."

But Sheriff Bagley wouldn't let it go at that. He gimleted at O'Hara with those hard, shrewd eyes of his.

"Just who the hell are you, anyway?" he demanded. "I never laid eyes on you before."

"You've got my name," O'Hara told him. "Tony O'Hara."

"The hell with names. They get changed every day. What about you?"

Now O'Hara was as swift in his likes and dislikes as the dip of a swallow's wing, and he didn't much care for Sheriff Jim Bagley.

"The hell with you, Bagley," he said, and swung about to go out.

For a moment the sheriff was balanced on his toes; then he settled back and returned to the poker table. O'Hara and Chuck Brand went out on the creaking wooden sidewalk.

"I was going to buy you a drink," said Chuck.

"Let's get it somewhere else, old-timer. Me, I don't fancy this place."

SO THEY took the necessary walk of about three doors to the next saloon, the Happy Daze, and went in. They went to the bar and Chuck Brand slammed down a silver dollar and made his demand. The bartender with sleekly curled hair, a wavy, roughed-up thatch, reached for a bottle. And just then sounds coming from a rear room smote invitingly upon young Tony O'Hara's ears. They were unmistakably sounds of battle.

"What's going on in there?" he asked politely. "Is it a private affair? Or a free for all?"

"Help yourself, kid," said the bartender graciously. "You'd be welcome I reckon. But most likely you'll get cut in slices and throwed out."

O'Hara opened the rear door and looked in. There were four men in the small, dimly lit room, and three of the four were bearing down on their single opponent. O'Hara took stock of the situation. One man against three, and the one man was slim and slight and no bigger than a six-

teen year old kid—and the others, like wolves after him, were hell-bent on taking him apart. And, at that first glance, Tony O'Hara didn't notice that the little man in the corner was a Chinaman. Not that that would have mattered anyhow.

O'Hara, on edge already, went charging into the room to do his very excellent best toward evening things up. He gave voice to a yell—he couldn't help that—that was as brisk and heartening as a bugle call. His fist took a squatty, burly man under the ear, O'Hara's favorite punch, and sent him staggering. A long, lean man, swarthy and twisty-mouthed, came leaping at him; his attack was unexpected, O'Hara having his eye at the moment on the fellow he was just flooring, and so this time it was O'Hara who was shot clean across the small room, and nothing but a convenient wall saved him from going sprawling.

Then of a sudden there was Chuck Brand in their midst.

After that the fight didn't last two minutes. The three men who had set out to boot the daylights out of the little Chinaman got away as best they could. A triumphant O'Hara and Chuck Brand, with the Chinaman clutched between them, stood up at the bar.

"It was all right while it lasted," said Chuck Brand. "Me, I've had me a nice time."

"Me too," said O'Hara. And the three,

clinking glasses said, as with one voice, "How!"

"Me," said O'Hara as he set down an empty glass, "I'm on my way. Thanks for everything, Mr. Brand, drink included."

"Call me Mister," said Chuck Brand, "and I'll knock your damn ears off."

"Try it some time," said O'Hara. "We'll have us some fun!"

"Lookee, bossee," said the little Chinaman, clutching with long-nailed, skinny fingers at O'Hara's arm. "Me, too, I go 'longside with you. You needee hleap good cookee man, that's so. All light, Wong Foo youah cookee man, and washee clo's *tambien, y puedo bacer todos* everything, and—"

"Oh, my eye and Pete's red sow!" said O'Hara and shook the Chinaman off. "What the hell will I do with a cook when I've got nothing to cook, nothing to cook it in and no money to pay anybody for anything? Get out."

Little Wong Foo grinned happily.

"All light, Bossee Man. Me go ketchum horse. You hleap dam good bossee."

He scuttled out. O'Hara stared after him and then shrugged.

"He must have got hit in the head," he said. "Well, so long, Chuck."

"Hold it," said Chuck Brand. "Another drink, kid?"

"No. I owe you one now. And I'm traveling."

"*Bueno*, kid. I'm riding with you. I've just got me a job, and believe me I need it. You're a Johnny-come-lately up here; you need a damn good foreman. That's me. Let's go."

WHEN young O'Hara forgot to be hard and mean and cynical, as the best and worst of us do forget at odd moments, he had a way of laughing that made you think of a storm wind blowing just for the fun of the thing. He rocked on his bare heels and laughed his head off.

"So I want a damn good foreman, do I? To do what?"

"You've got you a ranch, haven't you?" demanded Chuck Brand and sounded as hot-headed as O'Hara sounded gay.

"Some folks might call it that," grinned Tony O'Hara. "It's only ten thousand acres, though. And—"

"On ten thousand acres," said Chuck Brand, "we can run us quite a string of stock. Say twenty horses, a thousand head of beef. Then we spread out over a lot of free range. Say, kid, why not go places? We're there!" And he stuck his oversized horny hand out for the grip of ratification.

O'Hara kept on laughing at him.

"Me," he said, "I've got what you're damn fool enough to call a ranch. It's no ranch at all. It's just a spread across the mountains where you couldn't raise goats. I haven't got a cow or a sheep or a pig or a chicken. Not even a goose or an elephant. All I've got is some scenery that you can't beat, a couple of horses, and a lot of trees and rock, and a couple of little lakes and a hell of a lot of water running free—and who in his right senses wants any water?"

"All right," said Chuck Brand, and caught him by the arm. "Let's go. You and me, we'll go places."

"Mr. Chuck Brand," said O'Hara, "and mind you, I called you 'Mister' on purpose—you can go plumb to hell. I'll have no part of you."

He went out, walking on his heels because his toes hurt. He made his exit in as dignified a fashion as any man could, clad as he was. After him, clumping along in his big lopsided boots, came Chuck Brand.

"Bully," said Chuck. "Let's go find your horse."

"Good night," said O'Hara.

"Like hell," said Chuck Brand. And then he added, "Look who's coming! Nobody but our little Chink friend, Wong Foo!"

The three rode out of Old Riverton together.

O'Hara had to laugh. That was because he had a surprise up his sleeve for these two retainers of his!

V

THERE was a moon that night and a loose, powdery scattering of stars when the three musketeers, O'Hara and Chuck Brand and Wong Foo, came home to O'Hara's place on the lap of the mountains.

"Make yourselves at home, boys," said O'Hara as he slid down from the saddle.

Chuck and Wong Foo made an intensive study of the moonlit landscape.

"My eyes are bothering me of late," said Chuck Brand. "Where's the house?"

"No house," said O'Hara cheerfully, and unsaddled.

"No house, huh? And you bring friends home? Well, let it go. Where's the grub; me, I'm hungry enough to eat the hind leg off a wolf."

O'Hara turned his horse loose, sending it trotting with a slap on the rump. He struck a match and lighted a lantern which he took up from the base of a big-boled yellow pine.

The lamplight shone on two skillets and a couple of pots and tin cans hung on pegs he had hammered with a stone into the pine's thick bark. He lifted his lantern higher and brought into the circle of its flickering light a hunk of venison swinging from a bough. At the same moment there was revealed a horseshoe-shaped affair of smoke-blackened stones which without a doubt he considered a rough-and-ready fireplace.

"Help yourself," said O'Hara.

"I'm damned," said Chuck Brand.

"You ought to be," said O'Hara.

They fried thick venison steaks; in the tin cans were coffee, sugar, salt and pepper. There was a dab of flour for biscuits. And there was water galore in the creek threshing down over the bank to leap into the river.

The Chinaman did most of the work; he didn't say a word as he squatted over the fire with smoke in his eyes. He washed the tin plates and went to sleep at the base of a tree, his feet wrapped up in a saddle blanket, his head pillowed on his saddle. And he snored like a crosscut saw whipping through knotty timber.

"He's got the right idea, Chuck," said Tony O'Hara. "Good night."

"Me, I'll crawl off the other side of the mountain where I won't have to listen to the damn little heathen singing himself to sleep. And if when you wake up in the morning I ain't here you'll know it's because I'm somewheres else."

"Ride lucky, kid," said Tony O'Hara.

YOUNG O'Hara woke and stretched and looked up lazily at a summer sky just corruscating into a lovely dawn. So somebody had pushed a man named Bromeley off a tall cliff to his dizzy death, huh? And there was a girl who said ever so sweetly, "Hell no, Mister," and who might have done it. There were also two old codgers, Klipton and Towers, who somehow teamed up with her, and one of them might have done for Bromeley. Then, too, there was another girl who did swan dives from a springboard in front of a palace trimmed with greensward, and she had a brother named Billy, and he had just confessed that he had killed a man. Well, well, well. The sun would be up soon, and the sky was spreading a crazy canvas of impossible pinks and apple greens on a background of deep sea blue.

He sat up on his haunches, as erect as a rabbit, thinking. There was a man named Chuck Something; Chuck Brand, that's what. And a little dwarf of a Chink, or am I still dreaming? Wong Foo! How that boy can cook! Let's go find 'em, Tony old boy.

He had prepared for bed the night before by dressing rather than undressing; now all he had to do was pull on his boots.

He couldn't find hide or hair of his last night's guests. They and everything that appertained to them were gone, saddles, saddle blankets, horses. So O'Hara rolled a meditative Bull Durham cigarette, con-

ceded that the twain were early travelers, washed his face and doused his red head at the tumbling creek, and went about the affair of breakfast. Venison steaks had been good enough for supper; they were good enough for breakfast. Trout might have been better, but why bother so early in the day.

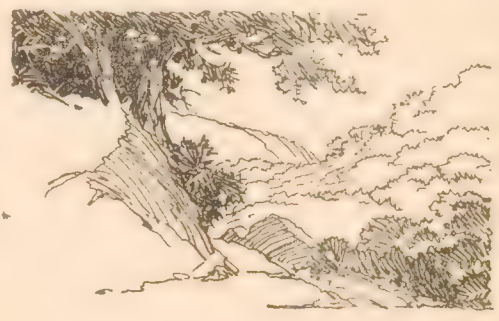
He took life freely and largely. But there were a few things he couldn't altogether get out of his head this morning, the way you wipe a slate clean. There was that Cinderella girl; there were Molly O'Hara and her nincompoop brother Billy. And, not to be forgotten, a fish-faced fellow named Bromeley who had taken his high dive into eternity.

"I've got more time than anything else, leaving out a lot of no-good mountain acres," he advised himself. "I'll be nosing into all these matters and affairs."

BUT the day was still new-born, and of latter days he was in no hurry about anything. He took up a rope and strolled a short way along a deer-trail which brought him to the green and lovely upland meadow where his string of saddle horses were; six of them, the cream of the herd he had owned when he owned so much more down in Texas. One of the six he had hobbed; the others did not range far. With them he saw Lightfoot, the horse he had borrowed from Molly O'Hara.

The animals pricked their ears up and watched him intently, yet even so the one he selected, a tall rangy sorrel, was not ready for the deftly flung rope. The others trotted a short way and snorted and shook their heads as the sorrel was led away to the saddle.

O'Hara was minded this morning to ride into a certain northerly section of his broken acreage which he had never once visited. He had poked along his wild creeks which were always singing and laughing and darkening and gleaming as they sped under alders and willows and through young, slim-bodied aspens, and flashed down into pools; and he had taken his trout out of them for supper or breakfast. He had hunted those several years ago when he first found this lost Eden of a place, finding deer aplenty and mountain quail and grouse and an occasional fat brown bear. He had climbed Indian Peak



and Squaw Peak, those two high, bald-topped guardians of his demesne, one on the east side, one on the west; and from their rocky crests had taken his mental pictures of this region which he promptly named to himself Happy Hunting Grounds, and which from the first he meant to have for his. He would come up here, he thought in those care-free days, at odd intervals, spending a few days, knowing all this would be here waiting for him when he heard its call again. And now it was his, and it was all that he had in the world; and he kept telling himself that was all he wanted.

From the spot where he had camped last night with Chuck and Wong Foo to the northern end of his Happy Hunting Grounds was some six or eight miles. He rode slowly for a double-barreled reason. You couldn't ride fast over such rough country, and he didn't want to. He owned two little lakes, tiny blue jewels like magic mirrors standing the world on its head in their glassy surfaces, and he paused at each, as happy to possess them as is a young bride to glory in her rings. He tarried in each grassy bit of meadow land; he watched small tributary streams rushing down into the golden sunshine from dark,

murmurous ravines. Yet finally he came to the North End.

HE ANCHORED his horse and went forward on foot. It was as wild a country as he had ever seen. Mostly it was timbered with fragrant cedars, dark and thick and making dusk of noonday. He heard the leap and fall and splash of wild waters and was a long time, winding his way among boulders the size of a cabin and through the thick cedar growth, before he got a glimpse of the waterfall. It shot downward over black rocks from a timbered cliff-top a hundred feet above, and, all white water, broke itself into fine spray where it fell like raindrops into a fern-rimmed pool. At the lower end of the pool where the water strove to be placid he saw trout leap.

The pool's overflow made a gurgling creek that slipped away through the trees, journeying crookedly, passing into a sort of thoroughfare fringed with bracken and aspens and willows and alders; then on into a flowery, green meadow, and on down in a smooth gliding ribbon to flow into one of his twin creeks lower down.

He sat on a rock and smoked and listened to the silence and to the faint threads of sound running through it, the swish of the running water, the sigh of the wind through the tree tops, the piping of small birds, the brittle cracking in a patch of underbrush where some small animal went about its affairs. He took a deep breath and went back to his horse.

"I'll have some sort of a roof over my head before snow flies," said Tony O'Hara. "And there'll be smoked venison hanging from the rafters, and sides of bacon and a barrel of flour, another of sugar, and coffee in the bean with a red coffee-grinder, and another barrel of apples put down in straw, and a sack of beans and some onions and potatoes; sure there'll have to be salt and pepper and a knife and fork and a big cooking spoon, and some matches and a box of books and a mail-order catalogue, and some jam and jelly and tomatoes. A few cans of peaches might come in handy and a griddle for flap-jacks—and a flap-jack flipper; and a hammer and nails, and a saw and crow bar, and tobacco, and some blankets and a lantern or two and some candles—butter, too; it will freeze hard, come winter time; and skis and snowshoes and— Make it two barrels of apples and add a bit of bear fat and the fat young bear himself, cured in the smoke and hung up alongside the venison and bacon and the seven hams. Now, let's see—"

Here it was a lovely summer day, pleasantly h[illegible]n the sunshine and just as pleasantly cool in the shade, and winter seemed far away yet also nearby, so did it invite to the real solitude. And with never a care in the world young O'Hara jogged along, dreaming himself his contented dream of things to be. He fancied himself an old philosopher.

Thus he returned to his camp and looked around, thinking it just possible that big Chuck and little Wong Foo had come back.

"Nobody. Hell take 'em anyhow," he said. "Let's go see Cinderella, the Hell-no-Girl for short."

There had never been any real road into the Happy Hunting Grounds, but once on a time, a long time ago, two partners had thought to have found them a gold mine up at the base of Squaw Peak, and had grown enthusiastic and optimistic enough to scratch a long scar on the slope down to the ford in Wild River, meaning to have six horse teams bearing yellow ore winding along it. That scratch in the mountainside, grown over now with brush and young timber and with many a tumbled boulder or fallen tree doing its valiant best trying to reclaim it for the wilderness, was the way which O'Hara coaxed his horse to try.

HE LOOKED a handsome, carefree young devil as he rode. He bestrode a good horse, sleek, thin-limbed, deep-chested, high-headed and with the gleam of

Satan in its eyes. Himself, he wore chaps and his stirrups carried flapping Texas *tapaderos;* bethinking himself of two men killed yesterday and of the two fist fights which in so short a time had proffered their influence against an overquiet flowing of the days, he wore a black-handled Colt at his belt. And his big black Stetson was cocked back at an angle—and his high-heeled Mexican boots were picturesquely trimmed in huge roweled spurs that flashed the sun.

And so, having splashed across the ford and found a steep trail up to the top of the farther bank, he rode on through the timber and at last came to the spot where he had had a word or two with the sweetest-looking little angel of a thing in a boy's rough, untidy overalls a man could ever have dreamed of or wished to see.

Presently he glimpsed the crooked old house in a cramped and ragged clearing. It was an unshapely mess of a thing with ancient log walls, all linchen-encrusted, and with a shake roof sagging like an old sway-backed mare's.

Then he saw the two old gray men sitting on a log.

They were the dirtiest old two men he or anybody else had ever looked upon. At first they were like twins; they wore straggling gray beards which had never been combed by anything but their unwashed fingers for the matter of at least the quarter of a century; their clothes were pretty much rags; their earth-colored toes stuck out of their shabby shoes; each had a shotgun draped over his knees. The shotguns, thought O'Hara, looked to have been imported into the Western Hemisphere sometime between the era of Christopher Columbus and that of Lord Cornwallis.

The two old men were snarling at each other when first he caught sight of them; they were like two old gray tom-cats. He couldn't see much of their teeth for their hairy lips, but fancied a scattering of blackened fangs. Two unlovely old animals they were, unlovely almost beyond belief.

As he rode close he decided they weren't twins after all; one was evidently a half dozen years older than the other; one had faded, red-rimmed, weeping blue eyes and the other's eyes were hard and black. When the two clawed at their shotguns and straightened up, he made out that one was tall and extremely skinny, while the other, a shorter old devil, plumply filled out his ragged coat.

"I take it," said O'Hara in friendly fashion, "that you two gentlemen are Mr. Amos Klipton and Mr. Jed Towers?"

"What the hell you want?" said the skinny man. He was Mr. Amos Klipton.

"I'm a new neighbor," said O'Hara, and turned on a smile all simplicity and neighborliness. "I thought I'd drop over and say howdy."

"Strangers ain't wanted," said Amos Klipton, and his voice was as friendly and ingratiating as a wild cat's. "So s'pose you git to hell out of here."

"Me, I says the same, Klip," chipped in Jed Towers.

As one man the two shifted their shotguns.

"Git to hell out of here," repeated Klipton. "Else we blow your carcass all to pieces. We got no-trespassing signs up. Now—scat!"

IT STRUCK O'Hara that the two old men meant it. Over their heads he had that barely glimpsed view of the decrepit old house; maybe their voices had carried to it; anyhow he saw the Cinderella girl come out on the rotting steps.

"So long, gents," said O'Hara, and turned to ride back along the way he had come. But he didn't ride far; he was figuring mathematically just how far their antiquated, broken-down shotguns would carry with any particular hazard to himself—and he was thinking too of the altogether trustworthy Colt revolver bumping at his hip. "The two old mountain cats!"

When he figured the range satisfactory

and altogether to his advantage he glanced over his shoulder. The two old men hadn't moved a muscle. The girl, her hand up to her mouth, stood statue-still on the steps.

O'Hara reined his horse in and spun it about in its tracks. Also he dragged his gun up out of its leather.

He called out:

"Now, you two old buzzards, you throw your guns down or I'll blast the hats off your heads for a start and then drill you between the eyes! Get busy!"

They got more than busy. As one man they whipped their shotguns up to their shoulders and blazed away. O'Hara heard the shrill screaming of shot all around him, heard its pattering where it struck, felt his horse leap under him where its hide had been dented—and then, with the horse quieted, he fulfilled a promise. His first bullet drilled a neat hole in the high crown of Amos Klipton's old hat; his second bullet carried Jed's hat clean off his head.

"Throw down your guns!" yelled Tony O'Hara. "Else I burn you down!"

Two shotguns clanged together as their two owners hastily cast them down. Tony O'Hara, very watchful, rode back to the house.

"Now, damn you," he said pleasantly. "you'll say 'Howdy, neighbor,' and you'll act a part of your ages. Ten percent of it would do."

They spotted every sentence with cuss-words which may just as well be omitted, since they didn't advance matters as far as O'Hara was concerned. Still, in one way, they did help: They gave him an understanding of the origin of little Cinderella's hectic, if limited, vocabulary.

Putting it mildly, "What the merry hell and damnation are you driving at, stranger?" was what they wanted to know.

"Which one of you two killed Bromeley?" said O'Hara.

"Who'n hell be Bromeley? Us, we never heard tell of him."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings," said O'Hara mildly, "but I take you for a couple of damn liars."

THE two old men looked longingly at their fallen shotguns. Give them the chance for a quick grab now—and where would he be, with his silly revolver! They'd damn well blow him all to smithereens. They'd not leave enough of him to scoop up in a shovel and toss to the wind.

"Us, we never heard tell of any Bromeley," said Klipton who, it seemed, was the more garrulous of the twain.

"I called you a couple of liars already," O'Hara reminded them. "Bromeley is the man that one of you shoved over the cliff yesterday. What's more, I saw the thing happen."

All the while out of the tail of his eye he had the Cinderella girl in view. He knew that she was listening and catching most of their words. At last she came down the steps, coming swiftly to join the party.

Jed Towers heard her hurrying steps and twisted about and yelled at her, "Cindy! You keep out of this! Get back into the house like a—like a lady ought to."

"Like hell I will," said Cindy, and came hurrying on.

Klipton, stirring nervously, added his shrill command to the other old man's.

"You go back, Cindy," he screeched at her. "You keep out of this. You damn well better, or else—"

"Me, I'm a growed-up woman now," said Cindy. "So I'm going to do as I damn well please."

O'Hara thought, "She's like a wild rose; she's a little beauty if ever there was one! Even dressed like a tramp and with a smudge on her nose, she is as dainty as a flower. And just listen to her!"

Just in time he threw the nose of his gun down to cover old Amos Klipton. For Klipton's rat-eyes had noted how O'Hara's gaze strayed, and his crooked old claws were moving guardedly toward his shotgun.

But Klipton jerked his head back be-

tween his bony shoulders at O'Hara's gesture, looking for all the world like a buzzard sunning on a fence, and began rubbing his horny old hands.

"Hello, Cinderella," said O'Hara, and lifted his hat with his left hand.

"Hello, Mister," said Cindy, and gave him a smile set in dimples which came dangerously close to taking his thoughts away from the shotguns again.

"Look here, Cindy," said O'Hara. "I just dropped in like a neighbor would. You can say, having met you yesterday, I came to call on you."

"Jed and Klip, they don't never let no men come to see me," said Cindy. "Most special, they don't like no young, good-looking men like you hanging around," and she both looked and sounded downright wistful.

"Dammit, Cindy, you keep your mouth shut!" commanded Klipton.

"I'm doing the talking for a minute, gents," said O'Hara, as crisp as a January breeze. And to Cindy he said, "Take up their guns for me, will you? Empty the shells out and threw them into the brush. Then chuck the guns out of their reach. I don't hanker to get shot in the back as I ride on."

Though the two old men glared at her, she obeyed instantly.

"Now," said O'Hara, and eased himself sideways in the saddle, his gun once more in its holster, his hands busied with a cigarette, "We'll chat for all of ten seconds. Yesterday I saw somebody kill Bromeley. I rode into Old Riverton and saw Sheriff Jim Bagley, and told him what I knew. I suppose he has been out to see you?"

"No, he ain't," snapped old Amos Klipton.

"He knows he better not. We don't want folks out here."

"Suppose I drop in sometime?"

"You'll get your damn head blowed off. Try it and see."

"I thought you was a wild man yesterday," said the girl. "The way you was almost naked, you know. You look good, dressed up like, today, too."

"You keep your mouth shut, Cindy!" growled Jed Towers.

She threw up her hand, commanding silence. Then all heard the rapid thud of hoofbeats. She ran down through the clearing to a spot from which she could look down-trail, then came running back, as swift and as graceful as a fawn.

"There's four-five men, riding hell-for-leather," she told them. "I bet it's the sheriff and his helpers!"

"So-long, gents," said O'Hara. "I'll be riding." Then he lifted his big black hat to the girl. "I want to see you again," he said, and dipped his spurs.

VI

YOUNG O'Hara struck around the old house and into the pine wood at its rear, meaning to have no truck with Sheriff Jim Bagley and his party, wishing rather to be somewhere else. And that somewhere was a few miles down-river, where there was a sort of lakelet with swans in it, and a high diving board. He couldn't quite get that girl out of his head—nor her kid brother, nor that brother's whining admission, "I killed a man; I didn't mean to! Carter Brill saw me do it." He had to wonder who Carter Brill was.

Riding along it dawned on him that, what with one thing and another, what with a brief battle with Chuck Brand and a free-for-all with the hellions man-handling the little Chinaman, and thereafter his own few hours of sleep and a trip to the farthest end of his crazy ranch, he hadn't really done his bit of thinking about anything more remote or more important than a coffee pot and a venison steak. And there remained several matters to which he might bend his brow, if not to advantage, then certainly with a spice of interest.

Thus—if the swan girl's brother had just killed a man, that man was, no doubt the shyster Bromeley. But why? Next he

said to himself, "Why damn your eyes, Tony O'Hara, you've never stopped to ask who that other O'Hara is, the one that owns the big house where Molly lives, and who ought to be her daddy! 'Steam Roller O'Hara' somebody called him. Now I wonder! Glory be, if it turned out to be that skunk of a Texas O'Hara, the man who took me for a ride— Shucks; no sense in that. There are O'Haras by the million just as there are Smiths."

It was no long ride; first there was a wagon road and from it he turned into a well marked trail where two horsemen could have ridden abreast; and then he saw the great big crazy house that Steam Roller O'Hara had made out of some ancient dream in his heart. Young O'Hara gawked at it. Garnished abundantly with towers and columns and balconies, all the thing lacked was a moat adorned with a portcullis; a man contending with a nightmare might have conceived a thing like that. It spelled money and a longing for something or other.

Then he saw the girl down by the river's edge. Clothed in a wisp of a white dress she was this time, with pale blue ribbons fluttering in the breeze which came sighing up Wild River, she was as lovely as ever and might have been the very spirit of summer. But she looked paler than yesterday, he thought, and her eyes even larger as though widened with a fear which she could not banish.

He sat sideways in his saddle and looked down at her.

"I've been waiting for you for hours," she said. "I thought you'd surely come— or maybe I just hoped!"

"I'm here," said O'Hara. "Of course I'd come."

"What did you do?" she asked. "What did you say? Did you see the sheriff? What did you tell him?"

"Who is Carter Brill?" he demanded.

He saw her shoulders twitch and knew how a shudder troubled them beneath that thin white sheathing of her summery dress.

"Why do you ask that? What do you know about Carter?"

"I told you yesterday that I heard what your brother said. A man named Carter Brill saw him kill—"

"Don't!" She sprang up and came hastening to him and put her hand on his knee. "Don't, Tony O'Hara! Don't say anything. It was all a horrible mistake, an accident like—like something that happens in a nightmare."

"I saw Sheriff Bagley, yes. He didn't seem much interested; he was in a poker game. Just now I rode by the place where the thing happened, where the two old men and the Cinderella Girl live, and the sheriff was just getting there. No, I didn't tell him a thing about your brother. Why should I?"

"But Billy didn't have a thing to do with anything that happened up there! He wasn't anywhere near that place!"

HER hand had slid away from his knee; with both small, tight hands she now clung to his saddle horn. O'Hara, wondering, looked down into a pair of frightened eyes, and he looked frowningly, not liking to be set at odds with what he took to be facts.

"How many men got themselves killed hereabouts yesterday?" he said bluntly. "Just a couple? Or a baker's dozen?"

"Two," she said faltering over the simple words. "Two, if you saw a man thrown over the cliff. The other was—was— Oh, it happened right near here."

"Why did he do it? Why did your brother kill this man?"

"I tell you it was an accident! He didn't mean to."

"And Carter Brill saw? Now who is Carter Brill?"

"He—he is a friend of ours. He is a very fine man—and square."

"So he won't squawk?" said O'Hara with a half sneer.

The girl whipped back, away from him. She said in a curiously stilled voice.

"No. Not if I promise to marry him!"

"Why, the dirty devil!" cried O'Hara angrily.

She couldn't help nodding; she nodded a dozen times so that her hair tumbled all about her face; it hid her eyes until with an impatient gesture she flung it back.

"I guess I will," she said, and sounded at once defiant and angry and beaten to her knees. "That's what Tim O'Hara has wanted all along."

"And who the devil is Tim O'Hara?" asked Tony O'Hara, a queer inflection in his voice.

"He is my grandfather. They call him a lot of names, good and bad, Steam Roller O'Hara mostly up here. Railroad O'Hara, they call him, too. And Big Tim. He owns this place and half the rest of the world. He—"

"I came up from Texas," O'Hara told her. "There was an old hellion of an O'Hara down there. He was dirtying his dirty paws in oil. That wouldn't be this gramp of yours, would it?"

"Most likely," she said, and tilted her head to look up at him like a cocker spaniel pup. "He owns more oil lands than a mule has oats. Know him?"

"Maybe," said O'Hara, and was once again as bitter as gar-broth. "Not that I've ever looked him in the eye. But if by some long chance he happens to be the crook O'Hara—and I seem to remember it was Railroad O'Hara they called him down Texas way—well then!"

"Well what?"

"I'd like nothing better than to rub his nose in the dirt, and then strangle him with my own two hands!"

She sniffed; she couldn't help it.

"Just try it sometime!" she challenged him. "He's tougher than saddle leather. Many's the man who's wanted to strangle him and who's got strangled for trying it!"

"And so you're going to marry this other crook, Carter Brill? Just because your brother's a killer and old Steam Roller O'Hara has got you whipped down? So that's you, Molly O'Hara. A little slinking moose of a thing, instead of the fine girl you might have been!"

She flared out at him then, as hot as fire.

"Who says Carter is a crook? Who says

I'm afraid of grandfather or any other male biped?"

"In love with Brill, are you?"

"Maybe I am and maybe I'm not. Anyhow, is it any business of yours, Tony O'Hara?"

HE LOOKED at her long and speculatively.

"It might be, at that," he drawled. He started rolling a cigarette and still kept his eyes hard on her angered beauty. He said by way of postscript, "Yep, it might be, and if it wasn't for that other girl, the Cinderella girl who's cuter than a basketful of chipmunks, it sure would be! You or Cinderella? Which?"

"Go get yourself a harem and keep clear of me," said Molly O'Hara, and meant every stinging word of it.

Then young O'Hara began to laugh; he hadn't laughed like that for months which stretched like long desert reaches across these latter days.

"Let's step along and see this old heller you call a granddad," he suggested. "'If he's the man I begin to think he is we'll grab him by the whiskers and tweak his bottle nose and tell him where to get off."

She looked startled; almost he thought, as shocked as by irreverence. She said, "If you're man enough to pull Gramp's

whiskers— Well, I'll change my mind about you!"

"Let's go," said O'Hara.

O'Hara slid down from the saddle and tied his horse; together he and the girl went the way they had traveled yesterday when they met the panic-stricken Billy. Again O'Hara glimpsed the monstrosity of a misbegotten palace with its columns and balconies and forest of red brick chimneys; he couldn't help compare this place with the broken down wreck of a place where that other girl lived.

They went into a living room, deep and cool and spacious; it was as ornamental as a beggar boy's dream of a king's abode and as cozy and homelike as a museum.

She left him here a moment, going in search of her grandfather. In about five minutes she was back.

"He won't see you. He says he is busy. He says you needn't come back."

"What's he doing?"

"If you want the truth of it he's playing checkers with the cook. We got a new cook last week, a South American who looks like a pirate and swears he is a descendant of Spanish kings. Gramp found out he could play checkers. I think that's why he hired him."

"Did he even ask who wanted to see him?"

"Yes. I told him it was a Tony Something-or-other O'Hara from down Texas way; a young O'Hara who had just lost everything he had to some other O'Hara in some sort of an oily deal. All he did was snort; he snorts like a horse when he does snort. He said to tell you to get to hell out of here and stay away. Then he called the cook a string of names and went back to his checker game."

"Nice old party," said O'Hara.

"He is the finest man in the world!" said Molly O'Hara. And then her bright eyes went shadowy and her long-lashed lids lowered and she said bitterly, "And he is the hardest! Harder than granite."

"Funny I should come up here where he has a hangout, me not dreaming that he'd ever been up this way," said O'Hara. They strolled back to the river and the artificial lake where the swans dozed with their heads tucked under white wings. "He ran me out of Texas. I'll buy him a hat if he can boot me the second time." A queer sort of grin crinkled into little lines about his eyes. He spoke without forethought, just off the tip of the tongue, when he added, "Maybe the boot will be on another man's foot next time."

"What on earth do you mean?"

HE [illegible]NT up into the saddle. "I never mean anything, and it's time you know it." But his grin held on another moment or so, fading away only gradually as the glow fades from the sky when dusk comes. He sat looking down at her for as long as you could have counted a dozen; he said abruptly, "What about your kid brother? Who was the man he killed? What about you and Carter Brill?"

She stiffened.

"I hardly see—" she began frigidly. But that was as far as he let her go.

"Well, you can see this," said Tony O'Hara, and suddenly sounded as hard as she contended her piratical old grandfather was. "Your brother Billy who looks like a pill to me, killed a man. That's murder, you know, And Carter Brill, who the devil he may be, saw the thing done. And he's keeping his trap shut for a price; and the price is a pretty girl done up in a neat package, a certain Molly O'Hara. And I'll bet you seventeen cents to a plugged nickel that the aforesaid Molly O'Hara is the apple of old Steam Roller O'Hara's eye! And maybe a certain Mr. Juan Jose Antonio de Valera O'Hara could raise merry hell with old Pirate Railroad O'Hara by telling the tale in the right listening ears! Oh, ho! Could we maybe jerk the stilts out from under old King O'Hara! He'll sit with his cook and play checkers, too busy to say the time of day to the likes of me, will he? Why—damn him!"

"Tony!"

"I want to know all about everything and I am going to! I'll have a talk with your precious brother; I'll know who the man was he killed—"

"Sh! I tell you, be still!"

"And why he killed him. And I'll look your Carter Brill over. How about blackmail? I'd as lieve blackmail old Railroad O'Hara, old Oil O'Hara, old Steam Roller O'Hara, old Pirate O'Hara, as roll a cigarette. Think that over, Big Beautiful Eyes!"

"You promised! Oh, you are horrible. You—you—"

"Old O'Hara got me down and jumped on my bare back with hob-nailed boots. I'd like to rip the hide off his back for a change."

"But you didn't even know him. You said—"

"I didn't know it was this checker-playing O'Hara. My place down in Texas is a mighty long way off; I never thought of him being up here. But I know now who he is. He doesn't do all his killings with his own hands you know, Molly my dear; too many killings for him to be in personally at the death every time. But he sics his pack on and takes the brush. And some day—by thunder, some day I'm going to have him standing outside with his hat in his hands, coming to see me. And I'll be playing checkers!"

"You've gone crazy!"

"Maybe. Who wouldn't? Now, where's your brother Billy? And where will I find your little playmate and maybe husband-to-be-with-Gramp's-blessing, this Carter Brill gent?"

"I don't want ever to see you again!"

She turned and ran back up the slope toward the big house. He let her go a score of light, quick steps and then called out in a voice that carried clear and far:

"Come back, or I yell my head off telling all about it!"

She came back. She said, "I said my grandfather was hard—"

"I was licked; your damned old O'Hara licked me. I was quitting cold. I was turning into a yellow dog—"

"You are a yellow dog!"

"Watch me turn into a wolf hound! Where is this whimpering Billy-brother of yours?"

THERE was something of a sudden burning so fierce in his eyes that she was overawed and made instant surrender.

"He is in the house—in his room—I'll bring him."

"And if you've got any Carter Brills hanging around this dump, bring them along, too. We might have us a real lively convention!"

"No! Carter isn't here. He's at Old Riverton."

Then she sped away and young O'Hara sat where he was, scowling and looking as ugly as he felt.

"Damn 'em all," he muttered. "They've burned me down, haven't they? They've played me for a sucker and a Come-on-Charlie long enough. Why the devil should I try to help them? Here's an open gate, kid; let's ride through it and the devil take the hindermost."

Then Molly O'Hara returned, her hand clasping her brother's as she dragged him along and he lagged at her heels.

Billy O'Hara was pale and pinch-faced, and his eyes were red and filled with horror. He looked up into Tony O'Hara's mask of a face and bit his pallid lips and tried to look dauntless and dignified—and then promptly sagged from neck to knees.

"So you killed your man?" sneered Tony O'Hara. "Where did you get nerve to do it?"

Billy wet his lips.

"It was an accident. We—we got into a quarrel. He hit me. I hit him. I happened to have a riding quirt in my hands. I didn't mean to."

"So you cracked his skull with a loaded quirt? He had just his bare hands, and

you got scared and hit him over the head with the butt end of a quirt?"

"I tell you I didn't mean to. It was an accident—it was in self-defense. And—"

"Who was the man? And what did you do with him?"

"I didn't even know he was—I didn't realize that—"

He couldn't say it, so O'Hara, knowing that he was lying, said for him, "You didn't want to believe he was dead, huh? Come on, let's have it all. You started to run away, I suppose—"

"And Carter was looking. He saw. After a while he caught up with me and told me he had seen. And— Oh, my God!" He began twisting his slim pale hands; sweat trickled from his brow down along his thin cheeks.

"Who was the man?" demanded O'Hara, and began to feel judicial.

Billy had to keep on licking his lips; they looked blistered.

"His name was Martin; they called him Marty Martin. He wasn't any good; he was worse than a dog. He was a sort of roustabout for two old men that live up the river a few miles, Klipton and Towers, their names are—"

"Ah!" said O'Hara. "Custodians of our little Cinderella girl! So you've been poking around up that way? And Marty Martin didn't approve? And followed you to tell you to keep away? And so you killed him!"

"I tell you—"

"Never mind telling it any more! Where is he now? What did you do with him? Lying somewhere out in the woods for the timber wolves to sniff at?"

Molly O'Hara flew at him like a small tigress. He caught her hands and held them a moment, then let her go.

He returned his attention to her brother.

"Well?" he demanded. "Where's what's left of Marty Martin now?"

"He—he's buried. Carter told me I'd better [redacted] that. He helped me. We dug a— Oh, my God!"

O'Hara looked at him sourly.

"Take a jackass," he said, "and draw its backbone out, then you've got something like you."

"Where are you going?" asked the girl anxiously. "What are you going to do?"

Already on his way he checked his horse and turned in the saddle.

"I'm riding home, but I'm going by way of town. Maybe I'll run into this Carter Brill of yours; maybe not. As to what I'm going to do, how do I know?"

"If you t-tell on me," gibbered the boy Billy, "I'll k-kill myself—"

O'Hara jeered at him.

"Might be a good idea," he said and rode away.

(And Where He Rode To Will Appear in the Next SHORT STORIES*)*

IF YOU WANT THE LADIES TO LIKE YOU

—HOME AGAIN SWEETS—AND HOW KISSABLE YOU LOOK!
—YOU, TOO, DEAR—IT WAS NICE OF YOU TO SHAVE AGAIN BEFORE COMING HOME—
—DON'T BE SILLY! I DIDN'TI—I USED THAT SAMPLE OF LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM YOU SENT FOR—IT'S A WONDER!
—IT WOULD!!! —LISTERINE PRODUCTS ARE SO WORTH WHILE!
—NO FOOLING SWEETS—I NEVER HAD SUCH A SHAVE! THAT WIRY BEARD JUST SEEMED TO FALL OFF! —AND NO IRRITATION AFTER—I'M SOLD ON LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM FOR LIFE!
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Lambert Pharmacal Co., Dept. 31, St. Louis, Mo. Please send me free and postpaid your large sample tube of ☐ Listerine Shaving Cream; ☐ Listerine Brushless Cream. (Check whichever is desired.)

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10

Shop Talk Among the Pilots of the Days of the First Air Mail; As Far Back as the Siege of Paris, That Was

THE INVISIBLE PASSENGER

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

ON THE strip of glorious beach reserved for officers, with the smoke of Pensacola against the sky and the blue Gulf smiling, we stretched out and luxuriated. None of us wanted to see or hear of a ship again, much less pilots. Radio beams and instruments were shut out of our minds for the afternoon.

And then in walked Giraud, bald-headed, twinkling, ever cheerful, and plumped down in the sand. Everyone in the service knew Giraud, the Early Bird, the best test pilot going.

"Oh, just dropped in, delivering a new bomber," he said to our questions. "And wait till you get introduced! Boy, those instruments—"

"Chop it," growled somebody. "I don't want to hear shop talk."

"Sorry, old chap," apologized Bill Ferry the flight instructor. "You're sitting in on a lodge of sorrow. We're sick of the damned routine. We're sick of air stories.

We're sick of the air itself! I'd like to see a zero-zero notice posted for a solid month!"

Giraud's twinkling glance passed around the group. He was born a Frenchman, and could no more be silenced than the wind could be kept from blowing.

"Understood!" he said with careless amiability. "It'd be a pity to waste the story."

Eyes went to him curiously. The bald head was known to contain more secrets than all the aviation instruction booklets ever written.

"What story?" inquired someone, biting cautiously.

"Oh, about Jack Reynolds and the spy, and the invisible passenger," said Giraud, as though it mattered not at all.

"Jack Reynolds?" spoke up a voice. "I hear he's knocking 'em cold out at Coronado. Doesn't have to live on his pay, either, with his dough."

"I was speaking of his grandfather," said Giraud mildly. This drew frowns and puzzled glances. Bill Ferry cleared his throat, studying his cigarette.

"Hm! Did I understand you to say—an invisible passenger?" he asked.

"No. *The* invisible passenger," replied Giraud. Another silence.

"Oh, blast it all, call off the taboo!" broke out an impatient voice. "I happen to know that Jack Reynolds' grandfather died forty years ago. Giraud, what on earth are you talking about?"

"The first air mail pilots," Giraud said promptly, beaming over his conquest. "The second man to take out air mail, in all history. Mangin was his name. He's the one who flew the invisible passenger I mentioned. Never happened before, could never happen again. That was seventy years ago, nearly."

"Oh!" said Bill Ferry, in comprehension. "Siege of Paris, 1870. I get it. When the government flew out the mail by balloon—only way to get it past the Prussians."

Giraud's eyes twinkled. He was a nut on the subject of that balloon mail and that siege. He claimed it was the first official air mail in history, and he was right about it.

"I still don't get your invisible passenger stuff," Bill Ferry said, no longer concealing his interest. "Is that some gag?"

"No. Fact." Giraud lit a cigarette and puffed at it. "Quite a few Americans were caught in Paris when the Prussians infested the city. Reynolds and a business pal named May were among them, but their business was secret. Reynolds, who spoke French, handled it.* And the blow-off came when Mangin took up the second mail balloon on September 25, 1871. Mangin had really got the government interested in the air mail thing. He was a dogged, steady, reliable fellow with a walrus-mustache and a hard eye, a professional aeronaut. His own balloon went to pieces on him and he borrowed another for this flight from Godard, who went into the manufacturing end on contract for the air mail."

"Did you and your old man know Reynolds, too?" said an irreverent junior.

GIRAUD grinned. "Jack Reynolds? Nobody knew much about him. He was a mystery—a brisk, capable Yankee. May was a lanky bird who said nothing and chewed cigars. Both of 'em stood ace high with the authorities, and were dead anxious to reach the new republican government at Tours, but couldn't leave Paris. They were guarded constantly, and it was obvious to all that Reynolds was a big man of some sort. However, this isn't their story."

"No," assented Bill Terry. "You mentioned a spy and the invisible passenger. Don't fog the issue."

But you mustn't forget this is a pilot's yarn, brother!" rejoined Giraud. "Mangin was a pilot, and a good one. He was

* Reynolds was not "Jack," otherwise real names used. Passenger's name slightly changed, spy stuff correct.

in on the start of this air mail game, too, before they had it going well, or before the Prussians got their anti-aircraft guns from Krupp. You look at Mangin and Reynolds as the Yankee came bursting in that afternoon with Bismarck's proclamation! He had full permission to pass anywhere, and it gave Mangin something of a shock to see him walking into the workshop so heavily guarded in secrecy. If you've ever seen a Frenchman's eyes pop over his mustache—"

IT SOUNDED humorous, and it was humorous. Reynolds himself could not help laughing at the expression on Mangin's face, and the secret service agent who trailed him everywhere broke into a laugh likewise.

All the hurly-burly around halted, at sight of this American who strode into the most closely guarded place in Paris as though no guards existed.

"Hello, Mangin! Didn't think your guards would keep me out, did you?" Reynolds chuckled, and extended a cigar. "Here, have one to take the edge off my news. I hear you're going to take this gas-bag up tomorrow."

Mangin nodded and accepted the cigar. Clad in a smock, he had been hard at work repairing some tears in the big blue-and-yellow bag.

They stood in the vast empty station shed of the Gare d'Orleans, which had been turned over to the Godard Brothers for the manufacture of balloons. Eugene Godard, hastily called by the guards, came striding up, and shook hands heartily.

"So it's you!" he exclaimed. "Everything's all right, then."

"All wrong," said Reynolds. He knew them both; he had been figuring on putting some money into the business, but was frying bigger fish. "I was at General Trochu's headquarters when this came in, and brought it along. One of a number sent in by flag of truce. A proclamation from Bismarck."

He handed them the paper, printed in French.

"Ah!" said Mangin calmly. "When Durouf took out the *Neptune* day before yesterday, he started something, eh?"

"What does it say?" demanded Godard, fumbling for his glasses.

"That the use of balloons is illegal in war, and any pilots taken by the Prussians will be shot on the spot as spies."

Godard exploded violently; Mangin merely shrugged, turned over the proclamation unconcernedly to him, and gave Reynolds a look.

"You did not come here only for this, Monsieur?"

"Not entirely. Here, Godard, get in on this; it may concern you. As you know, I've become interested in this air mail business, and others have been interested in me."

Jack Reynolds jerked a thumb at the secret agent. "My watch-dog, there, has several times noticed a man trailing me, a tall man with a black beard and gold-rimmed spectacles. Yesterday, this same man bobbed up when I was looking over the batteries at Mont Valerien, and began to talk with me about the air mail. Said his name was Schmidt, and he—"

"A Prussian?" cried Godard.

"No. American citizen, by his tell; served under Sigel in the Civil War back home. Spoke perfect English. I tried to hang on to him until this shadow of mine came up, but he took alarm and skipped out. Anyhow, I've no doubt whatever that this man Schmidt is a Prussian spy.

I've tipped off the police, and I'm tipping you off, to look out for him."

"Tall, black beard, gold spectacles—ah, my friend, thanks!" Godard rushed off to circulate the description among the guards. Reynolds inspected Mangin quizzically.

"You're not worried about getting shot?"

The pilot shrugged. "Why worry? I don't intend to fall into their hands. This air-mail is going to develop into a big thing. If you're so anxious to reach Tours, why not leave with me?"

"No thanks! I'll wait and see how you boys make it," returned Reynolds. "At that, you may have passengers. Trochu is announcing a rate of two thousand francs for any who wish to leave Paris."

"He'll make money—the balloon costs only four thousand," said the other drily.

REYNOLDS presently departed. Godard came back, cursing Prussian spies and rubbing his hands, to inquire if the patching were finished.

"All finished," said Mangin. "Take it back to the lot on the Boulevard d'Italie and we'll see in the morning how the wind comes. If it's fair, I'll get off about eleven."

Godard, who had made many an ascent in this *City of Florence,* as his balloon was named, stroked the varnished fabric affectionately.

"She's a stout old lady, this," he observed. "I'd not entrust her to many, let me tell you! But she's safe in your hands. Remember to fold the bag carefully after you land, and look out for the two big patches when you do it."

Mangin's hard, level eyes twinkled. "And the bullet holes?"

"Eh? God forbid!" cried Godard, and bustled away.

The bag was folded and carted off to the open lot on the Boulevard d'Italie, where Godard had installed his flight apparatus and gas connections. Mangin got out of his work clothes and followed. He wanted to see the net that enclosed the bag, and the basket, to be sure the ropes were new and sound. He was still at this, when a cab drove up and an aide summoned him to the office of Rampont, general manager of the Posts and Telegraphs, the organizer of this air mail project.

Rampont shoved aside all other business, welcomed him cordially, and fell to discussing details of the service; the idea had originated with Mangin, and Rampont wanted him to take up with the new government at Tours the possibility of balloons getting into Paris from the outside.

Meanwhile, in an office adjoining, someone was being questioned closely about papers and identity. As he talked, Mangin caught the name of Luntz uttered repeatedly.

Abruptly, a secretary appeared and spoke to Rampont.

"Al seems clear, M'sieu; papers in order, cash ready."

"Send him in," said Rampont. He rose and shook hands with the man who entered—a strapping man of perhaps thirty, with a strong, pleasant, clean-shaven face, wearing silk hat, frock coat, and a general air of prosperity and fashion.

"M. Mangin, let me present M. Luntz," said the official. "A Swiss gentleman who is to be your passenger tomorrow."

Luntz smiled, shook hands, and spoke with a slight accent.

"I've heard of the famous aeronaut; I shall confide myself to his skill with the utmost assurance!"

A FEW amiable words, and Luntz produced a bulging wallet. He handed over two thousand francs and took a receipt which would serve as his ticket of departure. Mangin, looking on, reflected with interest that he was watching the purchase of the first passenger ticket in the history of aviation.

"About luggage, now," began Rampont. The passenger, twirling a gold-

headed cane, shook his finger in smiling negation.

"None, except a dispatch case of business papers."

"Ah, good! We must figure on every ounce, you know," exclaimed the official, relieved. "It may be that we shall have another passenger or two—"

"Impossible, M'sieu!" put in Mangin quickly. "I was speaking a little while ago with the engineer in charge, M. Hervé. He tells me there will be three huge mail sacks, of a hundred kilos each, to carry, besides a cage of pigeons and the regular equipment. The *City of Florence* takes a scant fourteen hundred cubic metres of gas; therefore her loading capacity is more than full already. Another passenger is out of the question."

Rampont shrugged and hunched his head forward in compliance.

"Your word is law, M'sieu!" he rejoined cheerfully.

"Pardon," put in Luntz with interest. "I should like to know what's going to happen to your air mail service when all your famous aeronauts, Mangin, Tissandier, Godard and the rest, have taken out balloons?"

"We'll not lack for pilots," exclaimed Rampont with enthusiasm. "General Trochu is now placing a detachment of marines at our disposal; they'll be trained. We're signing contracts with Godard and Dartois for balloons of two thousand cubic meter capacity, and are certain of the supply. We hope to establish a regular service, leaving Paris three times a week, to last while the siege endures. Gambetta himself—"

Mangin cleared his throat. Rampont checked himself.

"Yes? The great patriot Gambetta—he will, perhaps, leave Paris by balloon? I hear that the Prussians have sworn to shoot him when Paris is taken."

"I know nothing, nothing," Rampont said hastily, and rose.

Luntz took the hint, shook hands cordially, and departed. When the door closed, Mangin regarded his chief quizzically.

"He is, perhaps, a friend of yours?"

"Not at all," said Rampont, chagrined. "I should have been more guarded; you were wise to caution me. No, we know nothing of this Swiss, but his money is good, eh? And, my friend, a word in your ear! If the pigeons you take out bring back news that your flight succeeds, Gambetta will leave by balloon with Trichet, the veteran of seventy flights!"

"You shall have the news you desire, provided the wind is fair," said Mangin calmly.

He was always calm, this Mangin; a cool head. All Paris was in a fury of indignation over the news of Bismarck's proclamation. Balloons not fair in war? Any pilots captured would be shot instantly.

Zut, alors! Barbarians, these Prussians! Mangin paid no heed, scarcely thought of the matter. Given a fair wind, he had perfect assurance in his own ability; he would not fall into Prussian hands. It was very simple.

NEXT morning he was down early at the Boulevard d'Italie station. The place was surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, keeping the curious away, and the huge bag was being inflated—a gaudy blue and yellow sphere swinging in air. Mangin looked at it and grunted that it made a fine target for Prussian balls.

His first business lay with Hervé, who supplied meteorological data. Everything was excellent, said Hervé; a breeze from the southwest, rather light but steady, which should carry him beyond the Prussian lines in two hours.

"At the same time," added the engineer, "I advise against taking a passenger. Three hundred kilos of mail is in itself a full load for that balloon."

Mangin shrugged. "The administration needs the money," he said. "The sun's

warm; it will heat the bag and keep it from deflating."

"True." The other brightened. "I forgot that possibility in my calculations. You're a wonder, Mangin! You overlook nothing!"

"Life's too short to gamble," commented Mangin laconically.

He tested the net, the cables, the basket. Officials arrived. The bag was fully inflated at ten-thirty and ready to go. The ballast sacks, the grapnel and cable—all was in perfect shape. Mangin retired to a booth with Godard, and shared a bottle of wine.

Jack Reynolds showed up, chatted pleasantly, and moved off among the officers and officials

The sky was clear, the sun warm; the rumble of cannon drifted from Mont Valerein. Mangin was calmly assured; every least detail was perfect.

At ten forty-five, Luntz appeared, silk hat, gold-headed cane and all. Jests flew thick and fast over his silk hat; laughing, he exchanged it for a cap with a bystander, and took his place in the basket. He was perfectly at ease, but word of his odd appearance and of his German accent sped afar, and ugly cries of "Prussian spy!" were heard from the crowd thronging the boulevard. Luntz, jesting with those around, ignored them.

Mangin climbed into the basket. He waved to Jack Reynolds, who pressed forward, and saw that Reynolds was staring hard, frowning, as though puzzled over something. A clatter of hooves; escorted by a cavalry squad, the post-wagon came up at a trot. Three huge mail-sacks were brought out and lifted into the basket. Mangin receipted for them and glanced at his watch. It was precisely eleven o'clock.

He gripped the edge of the nacelle and leaned out.

"Cast off!"

At this instant, a cry burst from Reynolds. Mangin looked down, as the soldiers holding the lines let go. The earth dropped away, but the voice of Reynolds lifted in a stentorian bellow.

"He's Schmidt! Your passenger — Schmidt—"

The rest was lost. The crowd, the streets, the city, all were lost. Mangin cast off ballast sacks and the *City of Florence* shot skyward. Montmarte, the northern forts, the Prussian lines, all lessened and dwindled to tiny things, and the balloon, apparently quite motionless to the sense of its crew, drifted up and up and away to the northwest. But the drift was extremely slow.

All this in a moment. Then the meaning of that shouted name penetrated to the brain of Mangin. He remembered what Reynolds had said the previous day about the spy. He turned and looked at Luntz, who stood gripping his gold-headed stick and smiling. That stick! Mangin knew it suddenly for what it was; a sword-cane.

Sweat ran down his face. Luntz produced a pocket spy-glass and began to examine the ground below. He offered it to Mangin, who refused politely.

"A magnificent view!" said Luntz. "This view alone is worth the price of the ticket!"

He pointed out various landmarks, but Mangin paid little heed. He was chagrined by the intolerably slow motion of the balloon. He tossed out bits of paper from the pouch carried for the purpose, and estimating the speed, perceived that Hervé had judged amiss; so heavy was the weight of the basket that the light wind was scarcely wafting them along at twelve miles per hour. Well, not so bad; he drew

a breath of relief, and glanced at the rip-cord, tied to the rigging overhead, and at the bag. The direction, anyhow, was right!

"They're firing at us!" exclaimed Luntz, and broke into a laugh of disdain. "The fools! A waste of powder."

TWO thousand metres, Mangin estimated their height, but it changed rapidly. Sweat began to trickle anew on his forehead. He tossed out more paper, and it rose in the air. Incredible as it seemed, they were going down. He loosed a bag of ballast. The balloon leaped upward, only to settle anew.

That settled it. A leak somewhere, and a bad leak.

Calmly, Mangin accepted the matter and made his calculations. An hour passed, and they were proved correct, for he recognized the countryside below. With care, they would get beyond all territory occupied by the Prussians, despite the slow speed.

Another hour passed. Mangin exerted every iota of skill he possessed, to juggle the leaking bag forward. Always it came down and down, but not until it drifted above the very treetops did he loose ballast. Ahead, he saw the big loop of the Seine, and the forest, that marked Triel and the end of peril. With the last bag of ballast, he might make it; but he must jettison one of the mail pouches.

Between the two men, all was pleasant. Below, squadrons of Prussian cavalry were at gallop after them; repeatedly, smoke jetted from rifles, but when it did so, Mangin sent the bag upward. Luntz, ignoring the danger from bullets, vented his admiration.

"Mangin, you're marvellous! Are we going to get beyond the Prussians?"

Mangin nodded. They were, at the moment, on a long and gradual descent, and the clumps of Prussian cavalry were distanced. But, with a sigh, he perceived that the inevitable moment was at hand; a mail-sack must be dropped.

"There," and he pointed to the bend of the Seine ahead, "is the end of Prussian territory, if my information is correct."

"But we're about to land, if my eye's correct!" said Luntz cheerfully.

"No; we're going on to Triel or beyond, where we'll be safe." Mangin detached one of the bags at his feet. "Give me a hand with this mail-pouch, and we'll get it over."

He meant the words to be a challenge, calm and clear, and so they were. Luntz shook his head slightly. For an instant, the two men looked each other in the eyes. During these two hours, alone in the heavens, a certain intimacy and mutual respect had grown between them; now death arose to strike it down. Luntz moved his hand. A click, and the sword came clear of the cane.

"Sorry, Mangin," Luntz said quietly. "The bags of mail stay aboard."

Mangin cast a glance at the ground; no danger yet. He looked again at Luntz, and nodded.

"You want us to come down among your friends, eh?" he said without heat. "You're the spy, Schmidt; you were recognized just as we left. We could not go back."

The gaze of Luntz glittered, alert and watchful.

"You don't tell all you know, eh?" he said. "Yes. We're going down. We're landing."

"So you want to get me shot, do you?" asked Mangin, without emotion.

"I regret that part of it, honestly," rejoined the other stiffly. "But duty rides with us, a passenger unseen yet exacting. Duty, Mangin—"

"I, too, have my duty."

The stolid Mangin suddenly moved. Quick as a flash, he whipped out a revolver that had been all the while hidden under his coat.

"Throw that sword overboard. At once, or I fire!"

Luntz stepped backward, an oath of

chagrin escaping him. His powerful features whitened, his arms lifted obediently. He tossed the sword-cane over the edge of the basket—

And, with the same motion, he seized the ripcord and jerked it hard.

"There!" he cried, and stiffened. "Now shoot."

Mangin swore hotly. They were falling now, falling near farms, trees, fields. He aimed at Luntz, who met the coming death with eyes unafraid and calm; for one agonizing moment, Mangin was actually pressing the trigger. Then he checked himself.

"Damnation! I'm no executioner," he growled. "Die—die on the ground below—"

Letting the hammer down, he dropped the revolver and leaped for the line and grapnel, as the balloon dove, the bag doubling over.

ALL in a flash, he perceived not defeat, but victory, awaiting him. Peasants were in the fields. No Uhlans were in sight; the Prussian cavalry were outdistanced. With the peasants to help, the mail could be saved, the balloon itself saved, and all was well. Luntz had been too slow in throwing off his mask.

This and more went rippling through his brain, while he casted. He made a perfect catch, fastening the grapnel in a hedge. The balloon jerked to an abrupt stop, but the gas was nearly all out; and instead of settling gently, it dropped with a crash.

Mangin, recovering from the shock, was on hands, and knees when something struck him under the ear. He fell senseless.

When he wakened to the sunlight, he was stretched out on a haycock. Two peasants knelt beside him, pouring watery wine between his lips. With a sputter, he sat up.

His gaze fell on the balloon and basket, on a dozen peasants excitedly gathered about it; but Luntz? Luntz, who had hit at the moment of descent?

"The passenger! Where is he?"

"Eh, M'sieu? The passenger?" echoed one of the peasants. "There he is—ah, he is departed! He took a horse from the cart. Government business, said he."

Mangin grunted an oath. There was a cart, with one horse in harness; but the spy was gone completely. With another grunt, Mangin came to his feet, and pointed to a half-loaded hay-wagon.

"Quickly! Get that wagon here. Put the [illegible] sacks on it, also the balloon bag; cut [illegible]ee from the basket. Where's the nearest town?"

"We're only a kilometre from Vermouillet, M'sieu, close to Triel!"

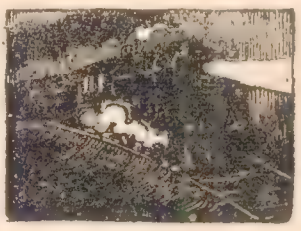
"Get the mail pouches to the mayor of Vermouillet, swiftly! Rewards!"

The word worked magic. All France knew that balloon mail out of Paris was to be rescued at all costs, and would bring reward. The peasants sprang to assist. The wagon was brought up. The precious sacks were lifted to it, and Mangin hurriedly got the balloon bag aboard.

"Off!" he cried. "I'll rescue what's left."

The wagon moved away; the horses were lashed, and it was gone with a clatter and a rumble.

Until now, Mangin had actually been so absorbed in the safety of the mail, that he had forgotten his own peril. Now, as he moved to gather up his personal be-



longings from the wreckage, he asked about the Prussians. A chorus of voices responded; they were here, there, all about the neighborhood. He must, he reflected, get away at once. There was the cart—

"The Prussians!" A wild yell went up from a man down the field. "Uhlans! Run for it!"

The peasants scattered like rabbits, but did not neglect their visitor. Mangin, dropping everything, was shoved headlong into a haycock and covered from sight.

He caught a pounding thunder of hooves at gallop; then German voices questioning, exulting over the wreckage, threatening. The peasants attempted denials. Mangin realized that the wagon with its precious load had escaped observation, and the mail was safe. Conscious now, most acutely, of his own peril, he hastily removed everything from his pockets—letters, papers, everything—and thrust them into the hay beneath him. Then he waited, motionless, a prey to suspense. The Prussians did not depart.

INSTEAD, he heard motion all around —footsteps, orders, voices. Something thudded into the hay, struck against him; luckily, the bayonet missed. A shout announced discovery, and he was hauled out, half choked by hay-dust and sneezing.

They gathered around—bearded, furious men, Uhlans and others. Harsh voices assailed him; at last came one who spoke French.

"Rascal! You know well that every balloon pilot is under sentence of death, on the spot! Prepare to die!"

"But, Monsieur!" exclaimed Mangin, who was really terrified. "I was a passenger in the balloon! I am a business man, not a soldier. The pilot ran away."

Translated, his words caused instant discussion, and Mangin understood enough German to perceive that all was now changed. There were no orders in regard to passengers, it seemed, an omission that was soon to be rectified by the Prussian high command. Reprieve was gained. Mangin was marched off to the nearest barn and placed there under guard; in the meantime, lances and bayonets were jabbed into other haycocks, the search was continued with a vindictive fury.

He sat holding his aching head. The mail was safe, the bag was safe; good! He himself was not at all safe. That hasty lie had gained reprieve, but they meant to hold him and make sure. Once they learned he was Mangin, the famous aeronaut, his doom was certain.

An officer appeared, demanded his name and business and other details. Mangin lied fluently, desperately; he was no soldier, and was not anxious to be a hero. Left alone once more, he relaxed, head in hands. The two guards watched him narrowly. His one hope had been that they would release him, but they were not such fools. If Luntz ever were found by them—ah! That damned spy! Mangin regretted vividly his own merciful restraint; it had sealed his doom. One shot would have avenged his failure and saved his own life. Now the gulf opened before him, with terrible certainty.

Voices outside the closed barn door. He looked up, started, came to his feet and wiped sweat from his face. He recognized one of those voices, and his agitation passed into a quiet, poised calm —the calm of utter despair.

The moment had come.

The guards opened the door. In with a burst of afternoon sunlight stepped a group of officers, laughing and talking. Among them was Luntz, still wearing his cap; not only was he very much at his ease, but he was treated with a peculiar deference by the others. A Prussian, obviously, of rank and birth.

Mangin drew himself up composedly. He heard his assumed name mentioned; Luntz was being asked to identify him. Very pale, he met the gaze of the spy, the twinkling, smiling gaze, and saw Luntz nod.

"Yes, yes, I recognize him, of course. The pilot? Nonsense! This fellow is precisely what he says he is. In fact, he's a brave rascal who saved my life just be-

fore we landed. Let him go, by all means."

And coming to the stupified Mangin, Luntz reached for his hand, cordially.

"You see, my friend?" he said in rapid, low-pitched French. "Duty is done; but there rode with us, also, the honor of a gentleman. A passenger invisible, but none the less with you. Like you, I'm no executioner. Good luck!"

And, laughing, he rejoined the others and sauntered out. The guards were called off. Mangin was told to begone.

Dazedly, he obeyed.

THE white sand of Pensacola, the blue glittering Gulf, an airplane droning down the sky above, were with us once more. Giraud passed a hand over his bald head, with a curse on the Florida sun.

"So that's your yarn!" observed Bill Ferry. "I thought there was a gag in it—that invisible passenger business."

"Don't be a silly ass." Giraud turned to him, suddenly earnest. "You know, I know, all of us know, how frequently it happens, up there, that we have the feeling of not being alone!" He jerked a thumb at the blue sky, as he spoke. "You know the feeling. It depends on the individual. We have different names for it."

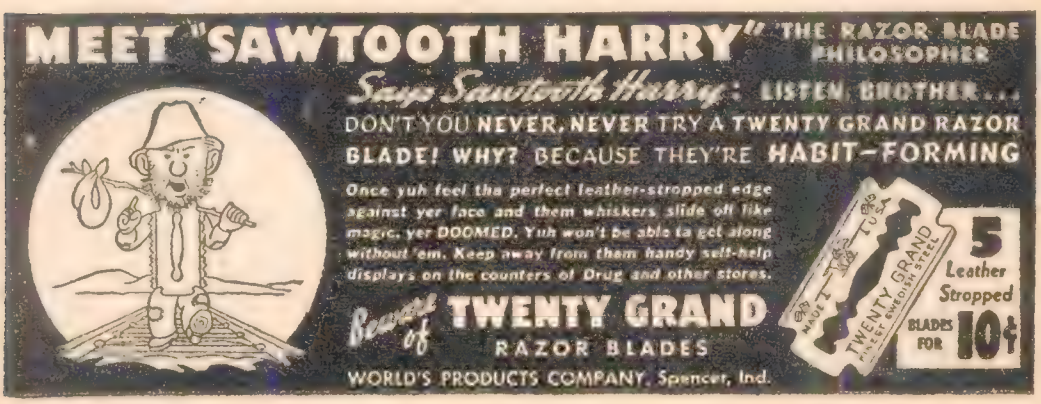
"That's a fact," said someone, on the silence. "You know, Joe Hartly used to claim that he felt things and heard voices. That was when he had the ship Art McManus crashed in; when he had a drop too much, he used to say that Art—"

"Cut it!" snapped Bill Ferry, and came to his feet. "None of this sentimental stuff. Last man out to the float buys the drinks. Who's on?"

"All the same," persisted Giraud, "that balloon left Paris with one passenger, and Luntz swore there were two. He identified the second. What more can you ask?"

"Plenty!" Bill Ferry flicked him a grin. "I detest a man who's always right. Come on, get on your feet—everybody!"

Giraud reached out, tripped him, and was off for the surf. Shop talk was ended.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One Man'll Live to Want and Get; Another Fellow's Life Is in His Thoughts

Up The Iron Ladder

By B. E. COOK

Author of "Wide Open," "In Dutch," etc.

HARD luck can take a lot out of a man. Billy Barrows was living proof of it. He entered my office dripping with the sweat of defeats. He was down to the stage where a man fights to retain his pride.

But Bill's face and manner showed one thing that isn't so plentiful in any man's day. Apparently his long stretch of defeats hadn't so much as dented that vein of gold in his character—and I fell for him then and there. I mean this—Bill Barrows had a conscience, a keen sense of right and wrong. Aye, and I was soon to discover that he had loyalty, too, the sort that any master or chief engineer rates top high in the men under him.

When Barrows introduced himself, I said, "Yes, I know, I asked your chief to send you here. How long have you had third assistant's papers?"

He registered shame. "Almost a year, sir. If I don't land me a third's berth soon somebody'll be accusing me of forging my license."

"What was your rating on that collier?"

"Oiler. Been taking any job I could get, times are that low."

"Well, here's your break," said I. "Chief Rockett wants a third assistant aboard the Gulf Line freighter *Cardoman.* Down alongside Pier Seventeen. Tell him I sent you."

No, Bill didn't blubber, but his black eyes danced with gratitude, his broad hands closed tight in the struggle to hold onto himself and I noticed he cleared his throat noisily. Also there was a wedding ring on the left hand that reached for the doorknob and he still was thanking me. With a wife to support, it must have been tough.

LONG after he went out, I sat alone, thinking what a great guy I was, quitting the sea to manage a coal concern and yet taking my valuable time to put these men and these occasional jobs together. Almost as good as being at sea again. Yes, thinks I, that Barrows deserved the break; he had the spark of loyalty, a sharp conscience—but wait a minute! Did Bill Barrows have the nerve it takes? The flesh and blood courage to meet emergencies in an engine room? The old *Cardoman* was a cranky ship, a sort of—well, she's one of those invalids that never quite lay up. A lot could happen there, was Barrows the man for third assistant's berth in her? He had looked so licked, so sensitive, for a prospective marine engineer.

Frankly I was almost relieved when a voice on my phone rasped out, "Who told you I'd have Barrows aboard my ship?"

"Who's speaking?" I inquired. "This is Larkin."

"I know it. I'm Cap'n Herrick of the *Cardoman.* I'll thank you to send no more good-for-nothings down here for jobs. We want men, not sneaks. I've ordered that one off my ship. If ever I know of his setting foot on my decks again——"

"Wa-a-ait a minute, Cap'n Herrick. I sent a William Barrows to Chief Rockett."

"And fortunately for him and you both, I caught him talking to the chief—in time."

"What's so fortunate about that?" I slammed in.

"What!" he yelled. "Mister, your concern values our bunkering charter and it comes up for renewal next month. You send any more down-and-outers—you—if I ever lay eyes on Barrows aboard my ship again, I'll see you and your job so far apart you'll never meet again. Never."

"I see. Listen, Cap'n, what's wrong with Barrows? Maybe I don't want to make the same mistake again. Is he crooked? A loafer?"

"No time for all that," Herrick barked into the phone, "don't let me catch him here—" Bang! the phone died.

CHIEF LYONS and I sat in his quarters board the collier *Eastwind,* the same collier Barrows had just quit as oiler to go Third on the *Cardoman.* The poor devil, thinks I, and—and the meek or gentle or something like it are supposed to inherit the earth!

I cut in on the chief; I didn't want to talk about coal gas or gas coal, not this morning. "Listen, Lyons," I said, "I ran afoul of fire when I sent Barrows to the *Cardoman.*"

"I should say so."

"Say so? Then why didn't you tell me in time?"

"Never occurred to me to associate him and Herrick."

"Just what is the gripe 'tween Cap'n Herrick and Barrows?"

"Oh, Herrick's stern, of course, but he's all upset too. Guess it never occurred to him that his kid was grown up. Awhile ago she got married—after he'd told her he couldn't see it at all. She married Barrows."

"Good Lord—"

"And d' you know, cap'n is so bitter he's vindictive about it. He'll crack down on Barrows every time any one mentions the fellow. Aw, Cap will get over it in time, he'll have to. After all, Barrows wasn't the only one that got married."

"Well," said I, "did you have an opening here for Bill when he came back?" Which was my real errand this morning.

Chief Lyon's brows went high, he started to say something, swallowed it and murmured, "He didn't come." He changed the subject, he talked on and on. And me, I didn't listen. I felt guilty, I had bungled, I must get hold of Chief Rockett on the *Cardoman,* trace Barrows and do right by him—if possible. One of the colliers coming in might have a berth for him.

I got up to go. "No, thanks, no dinner yet. I've got to locate Barrows," I protested.

Lyons walked ashore with me as though he sort of hated to let me away. When we got halfway up the pier, he stopped short on a sudden decision. He studied my face a few moments, then, "Cap'n Larkin," says he, "I'm no gossip and I'm supposed to know nothing about this little affair, but I do. Chief Rockett called me on the dock phone. You're heading on a wild goose chase so I've got to spill it: Billy Barrows is aboard the *Cardoman,* don't hunt him up."

I got his eye to make sure I'd heard correctly; yes, sir, Barrows was over there in the *Cardoman* 'longside Pier 17. But in what capacity?

"That's the tough part of it, Cap'n. He's only a fireman—and glad to get the job. You see, a new oiler had copped his old job here. Too bad, but—say, wait a minute. Cap, why are you so het up about him? He's only one of a thousand men start—"

"No, Chief," I objected. "You forget. His father was Chief Barrows who brought the old *Sunderland* in on a spliced shaft. I know; I was second mate in her. I liked Chief Barrows. Well, so long, Chief."

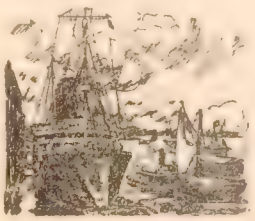
"Wait, Cap," he exclaimed, gripping my arm. "Listen, you'd better get Barrows ashore right away; Cap'n Herrick will raise hell with his papers!"

"And with me," I muttered as I hurried on to the el.

We were quarterway to Pier 17 when, looking out over the harbor, I saw the *Cardoman.* A black plume trailed off her funnel. Her siren was screeching. She was on her way to Havana and I was too late.

But Cap'n Herrick had vowed that if ever he laid eyes on Barrows aboard his ship again—and the Gulf Line's bunkers contract would come up for renewal—and Herrick's influence would put me and my job on the spot because, I recalled, Cap'n Herrick owned stock in the Gulf Line!

My hands were tied. Barrows was ruining himself and me and I couldn't do a solitary thing for either of us. The *Cardoman,* curse her rolling chocks, was gone!



I quit the el and descended to the street, asking myself who the devil had hired him over there? Who had defied the sour skipper that way? Why hadn't Chief Rockett discovered the foolish plot in time and sent Barrows ashore?

FATE answered these questions for me at a later date. In the meantime, things were happening aboard the *Cardoman* at sea. Let's look her over.

It's the third night out, she's below Hatteras. Cap'n Herrick's playing solitaire in his room. As usual? No. It is long past six bells, he should be abed.

For the fourth time he gives a pencilled message that sour glance of his. He deals the cards, stops dealing, picks up the note and reads it yet again: *"My third assistant reports number four boiler sluggish again tonight. It usually does go mullish when we get this calm heavy air. So we have to drive it to maintain schedule. Might have trouble. If so, shall keep it quiet as possible, as per regulations.*

signed: *J. Rockett, Chief."*

Captain Herrick laid it aside softly, as though rough treatment of the note might start trouble down there aft. "First it's that Larkin sending Barrows aboard," he muttered, "now it's number four again. I rid us of Barrows, but this boiler will beat us to the machineshop yet!"

Meanwhile, in his room aft, Chief Rockett also stays up. He is drawing designs on a pad. He is thinking what does the Old Man think of himself after he's butted in on his chief's duties? If he's going to pick my men here aft, how long can a person like me put up with the men he'll hire? And he happens to be a stockholder, too. I guess the skipper must be lugging a lot on his mind—or stomach—lately. Doesn't sleep much; his light's on after midnight reg'lar. Ho hum-m.

Chief Rocket's pencil began a new design. At first it suggested a memorial but it developed into a steam boiler of the widely known Scotch persuasion. Weeks later, he recalled that night and that sketch. "I felt a chill crawl up my sides," he says. "I counted the days till we ought to make it to drydock for general overhaul, and suddenly I had a big hunch. We were going to get there too late. Number four boiler would not give us time. Yeah, number four was going—"

The chief never finished that prophecy because he realized, all of a sudden, that there was somebody else in his room!

BILL BARROWS deeply appreciated what Second Assistant Grace had done for him. And well he might, for Grace had done a nervy thing, hiring him after the skipper had taken matters out of the chief's hands. Moreover, Bill had found this man Grace more to his liking than any engineer he'd ever worked under. Something emanating from the quiet fellow had struck home, especially when Grace had said, "I know how it is, I'd hate to go ashore myself and tell the wife the skipper had butted in on the chief to get rid of me. Humph, I've got the best baby boy in Boston and— Tell the chief? Tell him what? I'm the engineer that hires the firemen. I'm hiring you. Just keep quiet about it and don't show your license aboard here. Some day your break will come. Turn to on the Third's watch, eight-to-twelve.

You see, some fellows live outside, some inside. I mean, one man'll live to want and get things while another fellow's life is his thoughts.

It was the third night at sea, remember, and Bill Barrows had lived inside himself ever since leaving the dock. And now it was midnight, the end of his watch in the stokehold, and still he was thinking over what Grace had said to him. That's too much thinking; it makes a man brood. Aye, Barrows was brooding over his situation. Worse yet, he was holding it up to his conscience.

Notice this. The Second had told him, "Just keep quiet about it—" But that meant sneaking like a thief through the passageways, sneaking a drink at the fountain in the cross alley, always with an eye peeled for the chief. Barrows could not get used to being on the ship's articles after the Old Man, no less, had personally run him off the ship.

Remember I told you I'd read a conscience and a look of loyalty in his face, here in my office? Well, that third night his conscience must have been raising the devil with his loyalty to Grace. You see, he was keen; he sensed that eventually the chief was sure to spot him in a passageway or at the bubbler or else spot his

name on the articles. What would be infinitely worse, the Old Man coming aft for meals might catch him! I guess the lad figured his mean luck was certain to get him in this latest move, same as in about every other move he'd made during several months.

Like that, he climbed out of the stokehold at eight bells. But tonight he climbed on up the engine room flights with a set purpose. Bill Barrows had made up his mind. Three nights and two days; five watches at the old grind of raking, slicing and feeding fires hadn't cheered him any.

The Second, coming on watch, winked as Bill passed him, gave a passageway outside the same old once-over and went out. That wink made it all the harder, harder to break faith with Grace, harder not to "just keep quiet" any longer. He recalled, too, that Grace had boasted that he also had a wife—and the best little boy—

The passageway was draughty, cold. Barrows went on to the bubbler in the cross alley and drank. Before any one could interrupt his plan, he walked to the starboard passageway. Sure enough, the chief was still awake; his light was on.

He moved closer. Chief Rockett was at his desk, he was very intent over a pencil and paper, Bill Barrows took a good lungful of the cold draught, glanced aft where he hoped the Second wasn't watching him, then strode to the chief's doorway.

HE OPENED the screen, closed it carefully behind him. He waited a bit, but the chief's concentration on that pencil and paper didn't change.

"Chief—" Bill's voice seemed to startle the chief even more than it stirred himself.

Chief Rockett peered his way, glimpsed his fireman's dinge and dungarees, scanned his features. "What's wrong below? Who sent you?"

"Nobody, sir. Nothing's wrong below."

"Chief, I'm coming clean. I mean I pulled a fast one on you. I'm Barrows, the man that wanted the third assistant job."

"Yeah?" The chief was drawing again, you couldn't tell what effect that confession had on him.

"I'm firing in the Third's watch," Bill went on. "I don't want to get a black discharge for this, Chief, so I've come to say I'll quit her in Havana—I mean will that give me a clean discharge? I want to protect my license."

Slowly the chief's swivel chair rocked backward. He thrust his thumbs in his belt and the light glinted in his gray hair. Said he, in a far-off sort of way. "So the Second hired you to go firing, did he?"

"Hold on a minute, Chief. Don't lay it against the Second. I didn't tell him; maybe he didn't hear the skipper run me—"

Let's see, you hold a third's ticket. How long since?"

"It's green but I've had it almost a year," Barrows admitted. By that time he was positive the chief was prolonging the agony to punish him for the mess he'd made.

But Rockett said, "Then you do know something about boilers, what? How'd number four steam, last watch?"

Huh, that was something different. Barrows clean forgot what he'd come in here for. He reported water jittering in a glass gage, moist spots on a pipe insulation, a main stop valve he had tried in vain to turn, just in case.

"Chief," he concluded, "if we ever have to isolate that boiler it's going to take plenty of beef to turn down the stop valve up top. The cussed thing sticks tight, it needs oiling, overhauling and—"

"I know. Not oiling, though; we've done all that. I say the stem is out of line, the Second says a thread is burred. Either one of them can——" He went directly into a brown study, worrying

about the boiler, forgetting Barrows momentarily.

Barrows stood there in the chill wind from the fan, half shivering in his goose flesh.

Suddenly the chief let go. "How in hell an ordinary Scotch boiler can act so much like a spoiled kid—" He came back to the matter of Barrows standing there. He appraised the man in soot and denim. He noticed that the swinging fan was blasting the fellow with chilling air.

"Sit down out of that draught," said he more quietly, "I want a word with you, Barrows. I recall it all now."

BILL'S dungarees plastered to his thighs. He drew the grimy sweatcloth across his shoulders and waited on the edge of the clean chair. He distinctly heard the monotonous swish-clop swishety clop of the big up-and-down echoing along the cold passageway outside, coming in through the screen behind him.

"Barrows," said the chief at length, "Mr. Grace may be a small package, but he's a fine man. In some ways, you remind me of him, so I'll tell you why I let him take you on. The reason is number four boiler.

"We're not talking where the rest of the crew or the passengers can get unduly excited about it, but it's a mean piece of furniture, that boiler. But the Second's worrying too much about it; I don't believe he has any faith in the type of blow-off on it. Also he thinks the Third doesn't realize—well, anyway you're in the Third's watch to keep a close eye on it. For Mr. Grace's piece of mind. Maybe you've noticed that Grace isn't a rugged build."

"But," says Barrows, "he's never mentioned that boiler to me, Chief."

"Does he have to? Would anybody need to where you've passed the board and got your ticket? And you're firing that boiler? That's Grace's way, he allows for a man's intelligence.

"So you keep an eye on it. If it threatens serious trouble in your watch, you get word to the Third at once. And make no big hooray about it, understand, we're a passenger ship, not a collier. That's the story."

The chief turned back again to his pad and pencil.

Barrows unstuck his dungarees from the varnish and stood up. "Then I—do I quit her in Havana or don't I" he asked.

Over his shoulder Chief Rockett flung, "You do and I'll bust you. Go turn in."

I HAVE it on good authority that Bill Barrows walked on air when he left the chief's room that night. Not that he rated his firing job so high, but that unlucky license of his had somehow come through clean. He had taken a big chance on it when he had watched Captain Herrick out of sight, marched back aboard and looked up the engineer in charge of the boiler room. Men have been ruined for less.

Now he was right with the chief, he could walk heads up anywhere aft. Hell, maybe some day his luck would turn; had not Grace forecast something like that?

Meanwhile he crossed over to the port-side passageway. He descended the narrow stairway, heading for the fireman's fo'castle on the lower deck. He was dead tired.

He had scarcely set foot on the bottom tread when a piercing, prolonged *hiss-ss* beat upon his ears. It submerged the loud noises of the machinery. It knocked the weariness clean out of him. It sent him headlong toward the nearest entrance to the engine room.

Directly across from the fireman's fo'castle, he plunged into the lower maze of machinery, raced on and made it to the stokehold entrance. There a cloud of steam enveloped him so completely that the chief and first assistant, coming down from the upper level, didn't so much as glimpse him.

All three men knew what was up, how-

ever. The cranky boiler had blown a section or opened a pipe or shed its safety valve—something had certainly let go on number four!

And Bill knew all too well that the jostling he was getting in the steam cloud at the ladderhead came from stokers who were running for their lives, running as they had long ago planned to run if this thing should happen. He tried to get one of them to turn back, two refused him. Then they were out of reach and away in the steam.

He skimmed down the ladder. He could not see his hand before him. The uproar was deafening. He called to Grace and started toward the fire doors under number four; Grace would be there. He started—and stopped a horizontal spray of scalding water that stung his face.

He dropped to his knees to get beneath it. Already the plates were wet and coal came skidding ahead of another steam and water blast. Bill judged that a pipe line had opened up a seam.

The dense steam and scant air made him short winded, but he crawled over to the furnace, aware of the fact that anything could happen here, that any moment might be his last. And that is what I mean by his loyalty; he had to find Grace. He and Grace would, together, isolate that boiler before it blew up the place. He and Grace——

But he couldn't find Grace. The Second wasn't at the furnaces, he wasn't at the lower valves. Anxiety welled up like a spring tide inside Barrows, kneeling there under the fog, engulfed in the deafening scream of steam escaping. The sound of that steam warned him that the boiler would have to be shut down, the great head on it released—but where was Grace?

He forgot the furnace doors. He had to find the man who had hired him when he'd already been run ashore by the skipper. He hunted in the steam and confusion—until it struck him like a hammer blow; Grace was up top, of course! Up there trying alone to close the big valve, to isolate that boiler from the others. He was fighting the stop valve wheel, struggling to turn the stubborn thing down, to close it in time.

You see, Grace had ordered his stokers to open the doors and kill fires while he climbed the boiler. Now he was up there, that wiry, undersized Second, up there struggling in vain over the valve that Bill had talked about in the chief's room only a few minutes ago.

Bill crawled to the left of the boiler front. He edged sideways between boilers. He stood up to climb and again that horizontal scald struck him. This time he was too close to the pipe seam to get off so lightly, though; it caught him across the eyes and he gasped to the sudden shock and pain on closed eyelids. Indeed number four had a full head of steam on, and then some!

But Billy had to get up top, regardless of the scalding. He and Grace together would risk their necks to close the valve. So he flattened himself to the boiler's side, escaped the worst of the sheet of blinding hell thus, and he climbed. Yes, he did have trouble seeing his way up and his eyes were burning like a pair of living coals. He went up.

Until his hands sank into a paste-coated dust, until he arrived on all fours in soot and crawled for the valve.

He hadn't reached it when he ran afoul of—it was a leg. Grace was on his back up here!

"Come on, Second, there's two of us now," he panted and went on.

He gripped the wheel, but no Sec-

ond joined him. He tried to glimpse Grace coming. His eyelids were swelling, he couldn't see very well, but he did make out the Second and he was still back there on his back. Grace hadn't moved. And there was no time to go to him, this was the big job, this wheel.

He tried it, only to slide away in the pasty soot and dust. He set his feet again. He heard far off voices somewhere below as he gripped the wheel and this time threw his weight on it.

No luck.

Very carefully he got a new footing under the dust and braced himself. That time he gave it everything he had in one supreme effort. He pitched headlong, landed face down in the wet, bored into the grime and slid away on the top of the boiler, going on and on.

He fetched up on the brink of the aft end. His head and shoulders hung out over a black abyss. Dust mingled with steam and rained all over him. Stiffly he brought his arms back. He had come within mere inches of sliding to his doom and the realization of it did him no good.

By then he was wheezing for what breath he could get. His throat and lungs were coated. His arms were limp after the severe strain, first of pulling, then of bracing to check his slide. In this condition of mind and body he inched and wriggled himself backward—to escape? No, siree, for another try at that cursed valve.

Noises became a general hubbub in his ears as he bent yet again to the job. His eyes were so nearly shut that he had to feel for the wheel—and he discovered that he had actually started it around! He made a turn, fought it past the sticking point and whirled it again. And again. How could he realize that the chief and the First had checked the fires beneath him, down below in the mass of steam that he couldn't penetrate? In his overwrought mind the valve was the supreme thing. Shut it before the boiler ruined the steam plant and blew him and Grace into eternity. Yeah and the chief had been right, the stem was bent; and about then he caught the lowered pitch in the big noises all around him. The escaping steam was escaping less, the danger was past.

At length the valve seated. In the reduced noise Bill heard the men working elsewhere in the boiler room. He tried to shout, to report to them, and it seemed to him that he'd been up here a very long time.

But he had no voice at all, only a coating of sooty paste in his throat and lungs, a plastering that cut his wind and filled his entire chest with a weariness and dull pain.

As he told me his story, later, it was then that he fully awoke to the fact that he couldn't open his eyes at all. He touched the bloated lids and the touch drew a fiery flash of pain. He attempted a groan that never sounded above a wheeze. What had he done to his eyesight? Was he going to emerge from this venture blind? Had his foul luck taken the supreme crack at him, preventing his ever using his license?

"Damn the luck!" his soundless lips said. "If only I could bust it with my fists!"

NOW to get off the boiler and up on deck for first aid. He started to crawl. He felt his blind way toward the edge and ran against Grace still lying there. He traced one of Grace's arms flung out over the edge, a leg dangling; so that was it, the valve had flung him, too. And here he lay, as completely out as——was the Second dead? Cold sweat started trickling down over Bill's swollen eyelids. It burned all the way down over his blackened face.

In the momentary lull, his entire body clamored for relief from the punishment of these last few violent minutes. Being an experienced fireman, he knew burns, knew that quick relief might be his only

hope against permanent disability. I mean against staying blind. And the fear of blindness was growing on him, it startled him now—but what was to be done about Grace lying here?

It all paraded through his memory once again; Grace had hired him in a pinch, had taken him on at risk of his own rating. No, Bill Barrows could not desert the Second.

Nor could he call help—or even see anybody who might be in the boiler room. A shudder of despair ran through him as he crouched there, deciding what to do.

Then he faced the situation coldly. There was no choice, no alternative. It was up to him. So he hitched the limp form to the brink of the boiler head. He felt his way down among the pipe lines between boilers, set himself and pulled Grace down onto him, hoping the while that somebody would discover him and at least take Grace up on deck.

But the voices he had heard were nowhere handy now, and the dank steam still smelled strong in the lower air. Again, thought he, this was his foul luck; the others would be somewhere else, somewhere out of sight of him. This while Grace came slithering down onto his head in a cloud of grime that all but choked him, while he braced himself and broke the fall despite the confined space.

He fancied he heard Grace grunt when he struck. He hoped it was air jolting into his lungs. But the arms and legs remained limp and Bill settled the dead weight onto one shoulder, close against his neck. Yes, he was going out, out of this hell hole, out to first aid alone, unaided, with Grace on his shoulder. For Grace had not only a wife but a baby boy and Grace had done him a mighty good turn in a pinch. And to hell with luck.

How he managed to extricate those flopping arms and legs out from beween boilers and over pipes is still a mystery, but out they came. Writhing, twisting, wheezing, Bill Barrows emerged to stand once again in the bottom of the fire room on the iron stokehold plates.

He gulped what air he could wheeze into him. He figured the probable direction to the ladder while the rising fury of his own burns and bruises mounted during the pause. Then he struck out for the ladder, and not a soul happened to lay eyes on him in that critical moment—and don't forget, I had doubted whether this young fellow would pack the courage to meet the situations an engineer has to meet!

ON HIS way he kicked into a big lump of coal. It threw him off balance, it almighty near threw him headlong. He hugged Grace closer, he scuffed for a footing, caromed off the lump and barely caught himself.

He came up staggering. The surprise of it rocked him. It shook his faith in his likelihood of reaching the ladder—until, suddenly, his temper burst like an explosion within him. He damned his luck, he cursed his blindness, he vowed he'd carry Grace up that blasted ladder and out. All the way up through the engine room, by cripes, to the steward's medicine chest if it was the last thing he ever did get away with alone!

To be sure, this sort of temper would have been childish under less miserable circumstances, but it was the fighting reaction to punishment that had taken hold of him, the result of blind groping toward the ladder and the shock of that slide almost to death on the boiler—these were accumulated experiences that knocked Bill's temper wide open and it was indeed a fortunate thing for him. For it lent him a new surge of strength when he most needed it.

Plus the determination to climb at a time when Grace was becoming awkward, a heavy load on the way up the ladder. And Bill knew the count, seventeen rungs to the top, seventeen up into the engine room. Thence on and up again over three

iron flights and out ito a cold passageway. Already he was counting off, "One—two, three——&"

CHIEF ROCKETT emerged from between two hot boilers, dashing a shower of perspiration off his reddened face.

He straightened up to get his breath again. He was wiping his eyes when his ears caught a dull, thumping sound. It came from the far side of the room. He peered over that way, gulped, and stared in amazement. Over there on the iron ladder stood a grimy, sooted human figure and he had Grace slung limply over one shoulder!

Now the chief heard the fellow wheeze for breath, saw the blackened lips mouth curses, counting in a peculair, voiceless way. Who under the sun—he turned from the ladder and the chief gasped, "Eyes closed. He's blind!"

The blackened fellow's boot slipped off a rung and the chief cried out a warning, he ran to the ladder, beneath the man. While Grace's arms and legs dangled, the big fellow carrying him reached high for new holds. It looked to the chief as though the both of them were coming down in a pile. He reached up, seized the foot that had slipped, to guide it to a rung.

The next instant Chief Rockett stood four feet clear of the climber, nursing his chin. The boot had struck him like a rattlesnake and the sooty lips above him made wheezing words unprintable. Billy Barrows had mistaken assistance for something else in his furious state of mind. He was fighting mad at that stage, and up the iron ladder he went, up to much more than he realized.

The first assistant emerged from behind a boiler in time to see that two-man parade fill the exit into the engine room high overhead, to see Barrows sway precariously under Grace's weight, jounce the body closer to his neck, then dip headfirst into the engine room beyond.

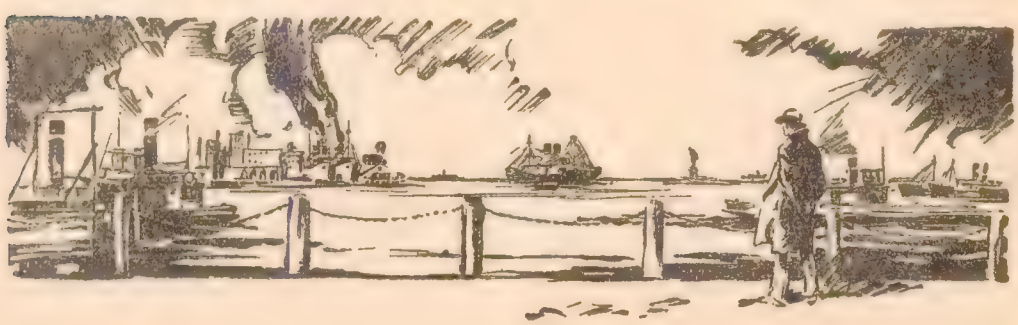
"Who in hell—?" he began.

But the chief was climbing. "Come on, 'fore he runs afoul of something, he can't see. That's Barrows!"

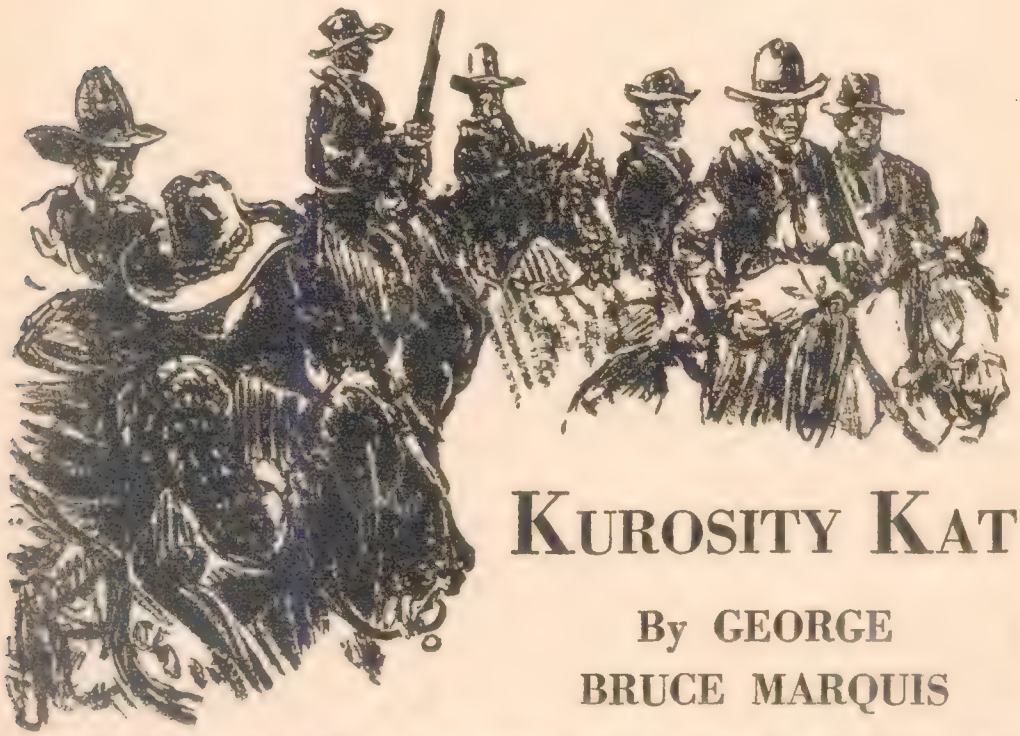
You could 'ave blowed me down with a calm when Rockett sprung the rest of it. Says he, "That 's how come I've signed on Bill Barrows for my new third assistant."

"Yeah—I was thinking about my own job and that bunkers charter coming up for renewal, see—"yeah, but what about Cap Herrick?"

"Ho, ho-o-o! Listen. I just left him—and Barrows. Cap Herrick has just introduced me to what he proudly calls 'the young man I'm putting into our engine room. He's my boy, chief, my son-in-law!' Can you beat that?"



Said Bat Jennison, "I've Seen Some Deep Wells, but Never One Without a Bottom, and I've Travelled Some Damned Long Trails but Never One That Didn't Have a Bend in It Some Place"



KUROSITY KAT

By GEORGE BRUCE MARQUIS

Author of "Beelzebub on Wrinkle Creek" and Other Bat Jennison Stories

BAT JENNISON rounded an elbow of rock, thrust out crookedly into the river road, and pulled up short. Nothing so unusual in the sight to step up his heart beat. He had seen it too many times before to accomplish that rather difficult feat. A man hung there just free of the wheel ruts, swung from the handy limb of a stunted cotton wood. The limb was almost too low for a man of his height, and it gave the unreal impression of a man poised on tip toe, though a hand could have been slid between his reaching feet and the ground. He had been hung without benefit of concealing handkerchief, so that Jennison was able to note that he was young, smooth shaven and handsome even in death. Nor had his hands been pinioned. They hung there in natural way as if his end had come without struggle or pain.

Jennison dismounted and approached the improvised gallows tree. A placard pinned to the dead man's breast called for reading and bootless speculation. Large letters, they were, printed not written, done with a wide bitted pencil on a scrap of light brown paper. And either by an unlettered man or one who aped him for purposes of concealment. Two words were limned against that unlovely background. "Kurosity Kat," Jennison mumbled aloud. Could this be the going name for the man, or an alliterated pun on a trait of character that had led to his death? Jennison pondered it but briefly. There was nothing in his possession even to suggest an answer. But being a curious man, himself, when possible injustice had been done, he pulled out

the long shanked needle with which the mystifying legend had been anchored, and transferred the paper to an inner pocket. Now he bent down and studied the man's hands. Pools of memory were stirred at that minute inspection, but neither fact nor fable quite emerged for present cataloguing.

He returned to where his pony fretted the earth with his dainty hoofs, small ears pointed forward, nostrils quivering, but not from hard riding. Disregarding these plain evidences of Sunflower's high disapproval of that gently swaying apparition, Jennison led him back and soothed him to obedience with a word. But to say that Sunflower was distrustful of that object presently jackknifed across his back, is stating the fact very mildly indeed. Now with the partially stiffened body lashed securely to the saddle, Jennison gathered up the reins and led the restive pony out into the road. He did not have far to walk. A hundred yards perhaps and the road ran free of trees and brush and the town of Humble stood exposed to this traveler's critical eye. Jennison had seen better towns. His instant opinion was, that he had seen no worse. A lover of the superlative, he halted a moment to contemplate the negative values.

THE situation at least was admirable. Humble lay on the east bank of the Humble River where that turbulent stream broke free from its narrow canyon. Yet its freedom was to be short lived. A mile down stream, as Jennison had already observed, the river was again trapped in a canyon that held the stream prisoner until it emptied in the mighty Snake. Above town the story was repeated. There was not a sizable break in the canyon's walls until the roaring placer camp of Full House was reached fifty miles up stream. As Jennison stood there, the wonder stirred gently as to Full House, his determined destination when he left Lewiston two days before. The overland stage road threaded Humble River canyon from end to end. It was one of the two props that sustained the rickety town. The second was the See Hole Prairie.

The See Hole Prairie was a half moon as to shape, the moon twenty miles in diameter. The curve of the half moon centered on Humble, the straight edge was ten miles away, directly west. The curved side was hedged by buttressing foothills, very steep, rugged and heavily timbered, save for that mile or so where the Humble River escaped momentarily from its canyon prison. The straight edge of the prairie was the Harpold Mountains. Without intermediary foothills, the mountains rose straight from the plain, in a series of towering cliffs, giant steps, with treads a hundred feet and more in height. It was forbidden ground, the mountains, and made so by a band of renegade Indians whom neither blandishments, nor force could convert into staid reservation wards. Free they had been and free they would remain, nor could the crocodile tears shed by Agent Hamlets anent the sorrowing great White Father at Washington woo these stubborn sons of the forests from their mountain stronghold. They stayed there, and whites stayed out, not by request but flint tipped arrows. The ten mile granite wall of the Harpold Mountains was breached at but a single point, observable to Jennison from where he stood. That narrow V-shaped vent had spawned the valley's name. "See Hole," the Indians had called it and Jennison viewing it now for the first time admitted freely the justness of the picturesque name.

FIVE years before and antedating Humble by two full years, the brothers Mellis, Lot and Tod and Amon had emigrated to the See Hole Prairie with their cattle. And because of that flattened mile, the future site of Humble, they divided the valley in rough equality across its long axis. Their holdings resembled three funnels, their small ends tapering out on the Humble River. A mile or so from the river they built their houses, all within a space of a

half mile. Mellis country the prairie remained for nearly three years, then Tod and Amon sold their holdings to a Mrs. Kodad.

Now Bat shifted his gaze to the town. A dozen cabins were grouped helter skelter about a street so short that streetlet doubtless would be a more fitting word to designate its brief span. Half of the cabins were deserted by all but the ubiquitous pack rats. The river side of the street was graced by a single building, too small for a wood shed, too big for a dog house. Yet it was the town's sole place of amusement. A two foot shelf held liquor, a small table provided gambling facilities. Opposite the saloon was another building where a man displayed his three ply skill, as blacksmith, wheelwright and harness man. Next to it stood a larger building, a general store and last of all, a stage stand with sheds and corrals. Here the overland changed teams and here on nights stormy out of the ordinary, stages on occasions laid over.

Three minutes at an outside guess would have compassed Jennison's halt, then he was moving on toward the nearest cabin and a man washing perfunctorily in a tin basin atop a stump close by the open door. He had thrown out the water and was wiping his hands vigorously on a linty salt sack when Jennison stopped his horse only a few paces away. Sack in hand, the man glanced at Jennison, then his eye traveled on to pony and burden.

"Howdy," he gave the customary greeting. "Is that your pardner and how'd he get hurt?"

"He ain't my pardner," Jennison answered shortly. "Besides that, he's dead."

The newly washed hung up his towel on a nail beside the door as he asked a seemingly natural question, with invincible corollary attached.

"How come you're toting him then? If he's dead, you can't do him any good."

There was no offense apparent in tone nor query, yet Jennison's retort was perilously near to insolence as he snapped:

"Don't the birds who roost in this said dead fall bury their corpses, or do they leave 'em lay where they happen to drap?"

"Showly they bury them," the other said placatingly. "You can see the graveyard right yonder. But them," he added, "I reckon it's only fair to say they don't hurry the obsequies as you might call it. Where'd you pick him up?"

"Hangin' on a cottonwood down the road a piece," Jennison told him. "Why'd they pick that place?"

"Because," the other informed him, "it's the only tree close to town with the right kind of a limb. If you found him there and I ain't doubtin' it, he's the third man in the past three weeks who's been strung up there, two of them at the same time. You can take my shovel leaning there against my cabin," he added pointedly. "After I've et I'll come up and help you if you ain't got him planted by that time."

APPARENTLY the interview was over according to the Humbleite's thinking, but Jennison judged otherwise. So he halted the leisurely retreat cabinward with a cold, curt request.

"Come and take a close look-see, afore you gallop off to your victuals."

The man bidden in so peremptory a fashion, paused, looked at this gray eyed stranger and decided to humor him. Yet inspection was to say the least perfunctory.

"I've seen him," he admitted. "Fact is he bought a martingale from me yesterday." He faced Jennison squarely. "If you'd lived in Humble as long as I have," he stated emphatically, "you wouldn't go round asking questions."

"Some men," Jennison remarked with seeming carelessness, "is jest nachrul curiosity cats. She's moren seldom a placer that yields some fine nuggets."

If the other caught the significance in Jennison's artful allusion to the legend pinned to the hanged man's chest, he gave no sign.

"I ain't curious," he shrugged indiffer-

ently. "And in my experience the nuggets you mention have sometimes been a bullet."

"Not yit to me it ain't," Jennison said dryly, as gatheriig in the long handled shovel he took up his trek for the town's Boot Hill. And there was no mystery in this common designation for the frontier

graveyard. Violent deaths were aplenty in those stormy days and the victims often undesirables, who merited neither pity while living, nor burial care when their hectic lives came to sudden stoppage. Men hustled them underground as they died and that without ceremony.

Humble's "Boot Hill" was unfenced, weed grown, forlornly neglected. There was not a head board to any of the dozen sunken cavities that marked old buryings, nor to either of the two latest, so recent that the grass had not yet sprouted at the edges of the twin pits. Easing the body from the saddle, Jennison laid him gently on the ground. *Rigor mortis* had not been complete, so that lying now on the back, the body gradually assumed its natural position. Jennison hesitated over his next step. The man should be searched, not alone for identification purposes, but for valuables, or articles of possible value to friends or relatives. It was a barren undertaking. Whoever the original searchers, their work had been thorough indeed.

Four feet deep were those graves as a solid rule and Jennison had it completed by the time the owner of the shovel strolled up to redeem his well hedged promise. Jennison crawled out of the hole, took his best beloved blanket from his war bag as winding sheet for this stranger and spread it out upon the ground. His companion looked at him rather curiously as if he considered it a superfluous gesture toward convention's outmoded demands. Together they lowered him into the shallow grave and by turns finished the simple interment.

"Life's one damned funny proposition," Jennison remarked thoughtfully as he patted the dirt into place. "A feller comes in outen a invite and he's yanked thence outen bein' asked also. Some hang on when they oughta be dead and then others git tripped up when their genrul usefulness ain't been used up. Thar ain't no rhyme nor reason in it to yours truly."

"You've put it about right. But what can a man do about it?"

"Not one continental damn thing," Jennison admitted. "And is thar a store in this town?"

"Showly," his companion assured him. "That second building yonder. Owned and run by Enoch Mudd."

"Kinda dirty name," Jennison grinned a feeble pun. "How does he fit it?"

"I'd say," the other said judicially, "that he should have been named Enoch Don't."

"As how?" Jennison queried.

"WELL," his informant deposed, "he don't smoke, drink, swear, gamble, dance, joke or smile."

"The hell you tell it!" Bat Jennison exclaimed, aghast at the appalling list of delinquencies just set out. "He's made up solely of a string of minuses. Ain't he got no plusses in his system? And also what does he do fur funnin' purposes?"

"Something you'd probably never guess," his mentor told him as he took the questions in reverse. "Over in them Harpold Mountains lives some renegade Indians."

"Yep," Jennison nodded. "I've heered so."

"Well," the other went on, "they live on

game they kill with bows and arrows and berries and so forth. They never come out and you bet nobody goes in neither but Mudd."

"How come?" Jennison pressed him.

"It's like this," came the explanation. "Mudd got to worrying about them breech clouted Indians. Said the whites had stole their lands and hunting grounds and drove them back into the mountains to starve, which is part so. Anyway he figured out that he had to square it for the whites in general.

"And he's doing it. Two or three times a year, not winter through, he drives a pack train back through the See Hole Gap, said burros loaded with calico, sugar and things of that kind."

"Tobacco?" Jennison edged in with a grin.

"Not much," the other told him. "And he *gives* the things to them Siwashes. The wonder is he gets back alive, anyway the first time. But he says Providence protects him and I reckon he must be right."

"Well," Jennison said generously, "he's sure got a big heart in him, even if he is named Mudd."

"He has," the other admitted, "except for a dog. Hates them is the only word for it. Well, I see one of them freighters is up there at my shop and I'll have to go and see what he's waving about. And before I forget it, my name's Dave Overholtser."

"Mine's Jim Hood," without conscious reason Jennison gave his well used alias. They shook hands, then as Overholtser turned away, Jennison halted him with a simple looking question.

"Mr. Overholster," he asked, "what was it you said you sold yesterday to the pore youngster you and me jest buried?"

"A pair of spurs," and Overholster, blacksmith, wheelwright and harness man was off. Jennison pondered his answer. Had Overholtser forgotten that down at his cabin he had told Jennison that the article of sale was a martingale? Or had he sold both or neither? Or had he, on second thought, concluded that concealment was the path of wisdom?

JENNISON returned the shovel and mounting his pony rode up town. As he passed Overholtser's shop, the man looked up, hammer in one hand, rivet in the other, briefly nodded then returned to his mending. As Jennison dismounted before the store he had his first sight of Enoch Mudd, the man compounded of "Dont's." A large man, he seemed to fill the narrow doorway as if to block all entrance to his store. Jennison's first observation dealt with the man's uncommon tidyness, accentuated to the near dandy state. Not only were his boots blacked and the long tailed broadcloth coat impeccable, but he wore a stiff bosomed white shirt. Short, close clipped beard, the upper lip shaved, a lip that was wide beyond the ordinary and very thin, hair roached back from a thinker's forehead and eyes deep set and noncommittal as to present mood, he gave the impression of granite determination and inflexible will. And if he had smiled, he would have flashed a set of teeth to marvel at and to convert. Yet he did not smile, nor would he for many an hour to come and he deleted any word of greeting even when Jennison had bade him a casual "Howdy." For he replied with a sentence that by no stress of the imagination could have been labeled responsive. Here it is.

"I see that like all wise travelers you are on your way to Full House."

Had Jennison been required later to justify his reply it is doubtful if he could have done so. Yet it came without premeditation or conscious planning.

"On the contrary," he had said glibly, "I'm figurin' on settin' up in business here."

"Here?" The question carried both surprise and ironic disbelief. "At what?"

"I take pictures," Jennison fabricated brazenly, "also I take a turn at feelin' of heads." Once embarked on the shoreless

sea of fancy, he rowed recklessly ahead.

"Got my outfit on a wagon back yonder," he romanced gaudily, "bein' drove by a nigger boy, Jake. I allus ride ahead fur to pick out a spot to pitch my tent."

"A photographer," Mudd analyzed carefully, "and a phrenologist combined."

"That's it," Jennison beamed, "a bamaquilist, hot offen the griddle, that's me."

MUDD studied the smiling little man and shook his head in doubt. For one of those traveling bump interpreting artists, Jennison seemed somewhat misplaced. Those two Colt .45s for instance, swinging so chummily from his lean waist. They whispered of other skills than those involved in fabricating a man's ambitions and achievements from the nodules marring his skull. All Mudd's past experience had gone for naught if Jennison practised even intermittently what he so jauntily proclaimed.

"Even if you're all you say you are," Mudd distinguished without commitment, "You'd be very unwise to open up here. You couldn't take in a dollar a month. On the other hand, Full House is an ideal place for you. I'd advise strongly that you go straight on. Others are rushing in there and first come, first served, you know."

Jennison's reply to the storekeeper's cogent reasoning was a three word question.

"Got any bacon?"

While Mudd stared, Jennison added, "I'm wantin' about half a side, not all fat."

It was the cleanest store by long odds that Jennison had ever seen. The puncheon floor, was spotless, the windows glistened in the sunlight, corners were shorn of that almost universal western decoration, cobwebs. Jennison had the vivid impression that it was unreal, fairy picture, a dream. That last drink now—

The bacon was weighed with meticulous care, wrapped duly in a triple fold of light brown paper of fine texture and knotted about with clean string. Jennison paid the score, then made a very ordinary request.

"I'd likta borrow your lead pencil," he stated. "I've jest thought of a man's name I wanta scribble down before it slips my mind agin."

"Use that pen and ink on the shelf yonder," Mudd directed.

"I'm more used to a pencil," Jennison insisted, "and I ain't used to either overmuch."

Mudd's answer was to dip the pen into the bottle and pass it across to Jennison, who perforce scratched dutifully on the wrapper sheathing his bacon.

"Evilsizer," he translated in triumph. "Never could a remembered it again likely."

Mudd glanced at the hieroglyphics and nodded. At that it might be "Evilsizer."

JENNISON retrieved his section of bacon from the speckless counter and without the customary farewell moved toward the door. A yard short of the entrance, at the beck of an instinct surer than reason he whirled about. Not fear of personal violence, not that, but something deeper, more subtle. Simple elements compounded to form the picture that met his eyes, a man, a stove poker and a spindly pup. You might search the lexicons vainly for three commoner things, but a longer search might be barren of yielding them combined as Jennison now saw them. The dog, well aware of his peril, crouched trembling in a corner, avenue of escape blocked by the storekeeper who crept up on the trapped animal with poker upraised. As Jennison whipped round, Mudd lunged to his planned kill and failed through eagerness. Before he could strike again, the dog darted under his arm and in his frightened foolishness, crawled beneath the stove, his head protruding, an easy mark for the murderous bar of steel. Dropping his package, Jennison leaped between Mudd and his whimpering prey, drew a gun and cocked it as he leaped and was denting that immaculate shirt front just above the store-

keeper's belt, as he snapped out an order:

"Drap that thar poker!"

Gray eyes and brown clinched and held, perfect mirrors of two unbendable wills, if field and weapons were equal. Again Jennison spoke in cold uninflected way, almost as if by rote.

"Mr. Mudd," he detailed, "that's a Colt's forty-five nuzzlin' your belly button. Should you not drap that poker, I'm nailin' you through with a lead spike that 'ill muss up your shirt front and coat tails, also. *Drap it!* Right! Now step yourself back outen temptation's way. And that's sense."

Jennison regarded Mudd long and introspectively and there was more wonder than censure in his tones when he remarked finally:

"They tell me you don't drink nor swear and so forth and simlar. Still and but my opinion is that thar's probable some bad moral twists checked up agin you in the book of life. A man who'd slaughter a pore little innocent pup has got a lot of black blood in him."

Impenitent and unabashed, Mudd answered straight from the shoulder.

"I am not interested," he disclaimed in his precise English, "in any strictures *you* may make on my conduct, nor any estimates you may make as to my character. Personally, I suspect that while you no doubt are a competent gunman, that you are a rather indifferent metaphysician. For your information, however, I will tell you that my wife was torn to death by a dog. Over her mangled body I took an oath that I would kill every dog that should thereafter cross my path. I have failed but twice."

Truth or fiction, it made Jennison shudder. Here was a man coldly sane, barring this one phobia. Had Jennison been a student of letters he might have been tempted to coin a phrase "canicidal," to describe Mudd's strange mania for slaughtering dogs. But Jennison was a student of men, not letters. So involuntarily he shuddered at the tragic tale and its tragic addendum. Yet he did not propose to yield this friendless pup, palpitating with fear beneath the stove, to Mudd and so reduce his failures to one. Instead he stooped down, whistled the dog to him and tucking the skinny body beneath his arm, gathered up his bacon and without another word left the store.

TWO horsemen were approaching from See Hole Prairie way as Bat Jennison stepped outside. Authentic cowboys both, they led a saddled horse, a magnificent bay, a full blood Morgan by every sign. As they cavorted into the street, the overland stage on its way from Lewiston to Full House passed Overholtser's cabin and came rocking up to halt with screeching brake blocks before Mudd's store. A single passenger disembarked, then the coach rolled on up to the stage stand for a change in teams before the journey would be resumed. The passenger was a woman, carrying in her capable hand an old fashioned carpet bag. With a wave of her hand to the grinning cowboys she disappeared into Mudd's store, to reappear a few minutes later clothed in a way that made Jennison gasp. Dressed now like a man, she wore about her ample waist a cartridge belt, supporting an ivory handled pistol. Nor did she need any hand stirrup to mount her mettlesome steed. With an agility that might have been envied by an unusually active man, she vaulted into the saddle and raced away at breakneck speed.

"Mr. Hood, meet the widow Kodad."

Mentally summoning a giant to properly house that rumbling bass, Jennison turned about to face surprise. For this master of ceremonies was only average pocket size. If he weighed a hundred pounds as he stood, his pockets must have been ballasted with rocks. An albino type, save for the pinkish eyes, mustache, eyebrows and hair were nearly white, yet not from the ravages of time. He stood before the door of the microscopic saloon, that is to say angling across the street from Mudd's store. As

Jennison turned the man reverted to the Widow Kodad.

"She's a real she-woman and no mistake," he asserted broadly. "She can shoot, rope or ride with any man and as for swearing, well, I figure she's got it over any man."

"From what I seen," Jennison made tentative appraisal, "she sure did look able. And I reckon she's a right to do this and that, only someway I hate to hear a woman cuss. Don't fit 'em accordin' to my way of thinkin'."

"All according to the way a man's been raised," the other said philosophically. "Anyway, the widow's a top hand at it when she's riled."

NOW he glanced at the rescued pup. "You must have stepped in hard to save that dog," he remarked almost questioningly.

"Well," Jennison admitted, "I did hafta put on a little pressure and that's a fact. How's it happen that no dog owner's ever shot that said storekeeper?"

"I saw an Indian nearly git him once," the other related, "but he failed."

"How come," Jennison queried.

"Mudd saw him first."

"Well," Jennison remarked thoughtfully, "I've rambled round hither and yon but it's a brand new one on me."

"Every man," the basso declared sagely, "hates something, I reckon. Some hate snakes—"

"That's me," Jennison grinned. "And fur no good reason either, I'm admittin'."

"Well, that's just it," the other nodded. "You hate snakes, Mudd hates dogs, I hate chipmunks."

"Chipmunks?"

"Yep, chipmunks," came the calm admission. "I pot one every time he bobs his tail at me."

"And *that,*" Jennison said flatly, "is sure too deep fur me."

"You never hated a chipmunk, Mr. Hood, that's why," the pseudo albino asserted with finality, "nor a dog either, likely."

"Also," Jennison picked up the statement before it was cold, "I ain't aimin' to. Besides, I'd admire to know how you come at my name?"

"Dave told me," he explained with a flirt of a thumb toward Overholtser's shop. "He told me besides that you and him buried a man this morning."

"We did," Jennison nodded briefly. "Know him?"

"Yes and no," the other distinguished. "He's been around here a day or so maybe. He came into my saloon for a drink. Said he was a cowboy out looking for a job. I directed him out to the Mellis place."

"Why not the Widder Kodad?" Jennison asked.

"Because," his informant answered, "she's not short handed. Lot Mellis is. And by the way, my name's Bill Soorick. Everybody calls me Bill but Mr. Mudd. He always pulls it out to full William. Who do you reckon hung the man you and Dave buried?"

"How'd I know?" Jennison retorted. "I jest rode into this camp. What's your idee?"

"I could guess," Soorick answered, "but that's as close as I could come. Maybe some of the freighters camped here last night, or the Mellis boys, or the two Chinks mining that played out gravel bar up the river a mile or so."

"Why," Jennison asked the practical question, "should the Mellis boys bring him clear over here to string him up? Must be a tree or so closer home than this one."

"Sure," Soorick agreed. "But they might want to throw suspicion further away from home. Still I'm not saying they done it. Lord love you, I don't know and that's the truth."

"Well," and Jennison chose his words purposefully, "she's mysterious to me who done it. I ain't no curiosity cat."

IT WAS a sterile effort, if words, actions or appearances told truth. The albino merely nodded as if in entire agreement with the sentiments so graphically expressed by the man who called himself Jim Hood. Yet from this nodding acquiescence he turned to Jennison and prodded him with a surprise question.

"How's the governor?" he had asked.

"What governor?" Jennison parried.

"Governor?" Soorick repeated just a bit petulantly, "I mean Angus Bryam, of course. And how's things in general over at the capital?"

"Oh, Washington, D. C.," Jennison portrayed counterfeit understanding. "I don't know. Never been thar. In fact since I left Virginny when I was ten years old, I ain't been—"

"I mean *Boise City,*" Soorick stressed, "capital of the territory of *Idaho.*"

"I ain't never been in Boise City," Jennison asserted. "Besides, Lewiston's the capital."

"Lewiston was till a year ago," Soorick explained, "then it was switched to Boise City." He halted his lesson in geography abruptly. "Hell!" he asserted flatly, "you know that. I ain't telling you anything. And you don't need to be afraid to tell me why Bryam sent you over here to Humble. Fact is he probably told you to get in touch with the marshal. Well, I'm that marshal."

"I ain't no ossifer," Jennison insisted, "and I don't know this Barnum you talk about as governor or something. Seems to me the only Barnum man I ever heerd of was the ramrod of a circus or sideshow. I ain't rememberin' which. As fur me, I'm a kinda sideshow man myself. I take pictures and tell what men likta eat by feelin' of their heads. I'm waitin' now fur my wagon with my tent and everything aboard."

Soorick heard him through, then he loosened a verbal shaft feathered with doubt.

"For just a showman," he observed sceptically, "you travel well heeled as to artillery."

"Oh these," and Jennison patted the well worn handles of his Colts affectionately. "Why at some times I've got considerable money on me. Consequent I'm able to pertect myself outen callin' on the marshals and sich."

"A thing I don't doubt," Soorick conceded dryly. Now he reverted to his original thesis. "So you won't tell me what Governor Bryam sent you over to Humble for?"

The obstinacy to near insolence of the self announced marshal had worn Jennison's patience thin and his retort would have warned a less obtuse man that further safe progress along this trail was barricaded.

"Mr. Soorick," Jennison said coldly, "I ain't in the habit of rechewin' my tobacco. Still and but, in *your* case I'm repeatin', said repeatin' to be my last and final. I don't know this governor you keep blabbin' about and I ain't sent here fur anything!"

SOORICK threw back his head and laughed thunderously. Then when he had won a modified decision over his mirth he chuckled:

"Seems like I heard you say that once before, but I ain't convinced."

"Mr. Soorick," Bat Jennison said very gently, "no man can call me a liar direct or in left handed way outen backin' it to the top bottom limit with a gun. I'm waitin'."

It was just like that. Not a stressed word, not the slightest gesture, but a plain invitation to battle. And Soorick at long last realized it. In this very personal present he stood most emphatically at the cross roads. And standing so he made a sensible

decision, yet with all the dignity of a thoroughly courageous man.

"Mr. Hood," he admitted quietly, "I pushed my talk too far. Consider what I said as not said."

"She's okay by me," Jennison answered in kind. Without another word he turned about, whistled to the pup just then pursuing a butter fly in ungainly leaps, gathered in the dragging reins of his pony and led him from the street.

The river ran parallel to the street, some fifty yards to the west of the town. Jennison was looking for a camping spot and he found it not a dozen feet from a ford, and upstream. The ford, he assumed, served the cattle ranches. At least Mrs. Kodad and her two cavaliers had splashed across the river at that point. The place Jennison selected for his stay here, brief or long he did not know, fulfilled the needs of pasture smoothness and shade. So he unsaddled his pony an picketed him out in grass warranted to charm the heart of the most fastidious of horses. His saddle was tossed beneath a fir tree, his cased Winchester leaned against its bole. For his war bag he had an immediate and personal use, a prop for his shoulders. For Jennison proposed to take his ease. First, however, he would increase the poundage of the pup with some of his superflous bacon purchased from Mudd, for a reason.

He did not call the pup, for that gaunt image of a dog was already within touching distance. Jennison chunked the meat, arched it upward and chuckled as the pup displayed his acrobatic prowess by snagging each piece midair. Without one fumble. Four, possibly five, pounds passed from tossing hand to receiving jaws before Jennison decided the game had run its time limit. The dog conceded the point after a few moments of languid expectancy, found himself a sunny dust heap not too far away and surrendered to Morpheus.

Jennison in his turn, drew from his pocket the scrap of paper bearing the legend, "Kurosity Kat" and using the remnant of wrapped bacon as a knee board, set himself to an investigation. It was a matter of swift accomplishment. After all, it was less an investigation than the verification of a set conviction. Now he replaced the curious message, without rising, wedged the bacon in the crotch of a limb, filled his pipe and settled himself to think.

IN HIS methodical way he reviewed item by item the incidents clustering about his brief contact with Humble. The dead man, hung as a meaningful sign at the very gates of the town, Dave Overholtser, Enoch Mudd, Mrs. Kodad, Bill Soorick, all were recipients of his painstaking and analytical scrutiny. And though he had set out very definitely for Full House he decided to exercise a stop-over privilege. There was something intriguing him that spoke of mystery, that was full warrant for delay. Things were awry in this camp, with a definite population of less than a dozen men. Where else in so few could be found two haters, with objects so incredible, as Mudd and Soorick? Jennison had traveled many strange trails, had wandered far where the grotesque and freakish seemed almost commonplace, yet never before had he met an Enoch Mudd and a Bill Soorick. Mudd had plainly tried to shunt Jennison from locating here. Soorick willfully had pushed his insistence that Jennison was an emissary from the governor of Idaho Territory, to the very brink of war. Yes, indeed, Jennison being Jennison would tarry here.

This decided, he turned his memory backward in an effort to recapture certain things scarcely tabulated at the time by his uninterested mind. In a saloon in Lewiston, he had heard shreds of a desultory conversation between two men seated at a table just a few steps away. And because he had planned to go to Full House by a road which he knew vaguely passed through Humble, the naming of this tiny town had caught and held his more or less casual

attention. But he had heard rather little, he now reflected and that at different points in the two man discussion. From what little, by a feat of memory, he was now reconstructing the tale bit by bit. There was something wrong at Humble, its nature unknown to the narrator. But it had assumed so grave proportions that the governor of the territory had at last sent to Humble two men, a judge and a marshal. If their names were mentioned, Jennison either did not hear them, or hearing, did not register them for future reference. However, this judge and marshal disappeared at Humble. That would be, perhaps, a month ago. At length the governor had sent a third man whose name Jennison did recall. Fred Geer. Whether Geer had succeeded or not the two at Lewiston did not know. But Jennison knew. For they had described Geer by a disability, rare enough to make identification certain. Geer, so one of them related had webbed fingers on either hand, the middle and third fingers joined to the first joint. In those unlearned days, they as a rule neglected to do what in the modern days a surgeon would consider to be a simple task indeed. Webbed at birth, webbed through life was the common course of events. Yes, Jennison knew what had become of Fred Geer, for he and Overholtser had buried him that very morning! And he did not doubt that the two new graves he had noted, held the judge and the marshal. It was indeed making the tritest of trite remarks to say that Jennison would stay awhile in Humble.

Meanwhile he sought diversion and food. When on the road, Jennison was a genuine dew duster. This morning he had crawled from his blankets when it was hard upon dawn, had eaten breakfast and was on his way when it was scarcely light enough to see the trail in the deep gorge. By constitution and training he was a competent feeder and he cared not when. Should the wish assail him he gratified it forthwith, if possible. So now, long before noon the desire was upon him. The presence of the river suggested an easy variation in the usual flat menu and one of magnificently simple attainment. Trout. No skill was required and only the rudest of implements. It was unbelievably easy in those days before the dry fly and automatic reel. Around his hat was wound a stout fishline, leaderless, the unfeathered hook tied to the thick line with a slovenly knot.

HE CUT a willow pole, more like an ox goad than the thin tapering rod of the modern angler, tied his line to its knobby tip and whipping the line out into the water to unkink it somewhat, sought bait. To turn over a flat rock, to pick up a pair of penny winkles, the grub according to tradition of a future salmon fly, to peel away the limber shell, to spit in careless way on his plain hook one of the large yellowish black headed grubs, was as simple as the telling and a deal more speedy. And at the first cast he got results. A fifteen inch rainbow beat a twelve inch runner-up to that succulent worm by the width of a fin. Jennison did not play him. That would have been considered unsportsmanlike in those primitive days. He knew his pole, he knew his line and had confidence in his massive hook. Therefore, he lugged the trout forth, almost before the snagged fish had arranged the preliminaries of a battle for freedom. Three minutes more of this tiring sport and Jennison was rewinding his line. And he had a second and larger fish, this one a bull trout. It was just that easy. Trout were numberless and unsophisticated.

With his fish cleaned and ready for the pan, Jennison returned to his camp, distant at any time, not over twenty yards. He built a fire, filled his coffee pot at the stream and was in the act of turning back when the goddess Fortuna intervened to save him. Her bright angel of the moment was a harmless little water snake that slithered over the rock upon which Jennison was just setting foot. He reacted instantly to his only fear, with a leap that carried

him well into the class of the Olympic champions. In consequence the bullet aimed with masterly skill missed him by a wide margin to find itself a harmless lodging in a well rotted stump. Had Jennison stood on the snake-disputed rock the slug would have bored him through on a line an inch above his thin hips. Death would have been as certain as though he had been crushed beneath an avalanche, though a deal slower and infinitely more painful.

By the time the roaring crash of the rifle had reached him, Jennison was moving swiftly to rebuke the presumptuous gunman concealed in a thicket of buck brush on the town side of the river. His location was simply the labor of one lightning glance. The blob of powder smoke lay there before his ambuscade to be fretted away gradually in the breezeless air. As to distance, it was likely short of a hundred yards, with vertical elevation a fourth as great. Jennison seized his Winchester, shucked off the canvas scabbard and stepping out into the open laced the air with a dozen bullets fired at incredible speed and with amazing accuracy. Not the bushes alone just behind the fading plume of smoke received his attention, but he planted the lead seed in a circle, then crisscrossed the plot enclosed in a way that left little space unvisited by the querying bullets. If the bushwhacker were still there, he made no move to return the season's compliments.

JENNISON'S machine gun like exhibition had brought four men into view. A fat man had waddled out from the stage stand; Overholtser had bolted from his shop, the felloe of a wagon wheel in his hand; Mudd had made a tardy appearance before his store; Bill Soorick charged into the street from his toy saloon. Four had appeared, yet Soorick alone showed interest beyond that very natural act. He alone seemed bent on asking questions. So while Jennison recharged the magazine of his rifle Soorick was approaching in some evident haste. But the self proclaimed marshal of Humble was not there to ask questions, but to administer stern rebuke. A few feet away he halted.

"You can't shoot off guns in this town," he thundered.

"Where's the town?" Jennison snapped back.

With a lordly wave of his pale hand, the albino indicated the four buildings and the few shabby cabins.

"There," he announced dramatically.

"So *that's* it!" Jennison acknowledged icily. "She looks jest like a turn out place in a road. I'd a never guessed it was a town."

"That's the town," Soorick maintained, "and it's against the law to shoot off guns inside its limits. If you noticed them Kodad cowboys kept their shooting irons in their holsters while they were here. Nobody can do it. I'm fining you twenty dollars for this first offense. Next time it will be doubled."

"She's okey I reckon fur a cannonader outside the limits to plug at a feller inside," Jennison retorted sarcastically. "Since you're so set on enforcin' the law why don't you ramble up into them bushes and drag that rabbit out by his tail? Or don't you arrest your friends, 'specially when they're out on a job you set 'em at?"

"I didn't see him shoot at you," Soorick insisted stubbornly, "and I don't know who he is neither. But I did see you shoot. Fork over that twenty dollars or I'll levy on your horse till you pay it."

"Mr. Skybrick," Jennison said quietly, "you're either a damned crook or a damned jug-headed jassax. I ain't quite sure which, but more probable both. But I'm wastin' my time long enough to give you some advice, which bein' a perfect damned fool you likely won't take. Still and but I'll give it to you. Should you crave to live and move and have your daily beans, *don't tetch that thar hoss!* Also be movin'. I'll give you five seconds, no more, to start travelin'."

Soorick was brave, but not that brave. Good gunman that he was, he doubted his ability to cope with this gray-eyed stranger. Yet official dignity demanded a parting threat.

"Nevertheless," he asserted broadly, "I'll collect that fine."

"You'll collect it with a pistol if you do," Jennison said uncompromisingly. "And now's as good a time as any."

To this unqualified invitation the marshal made no answer. Arguments had been exhausted save one and he did not care to set it forth just now. He dared not face Jennison's fiery rebuttal. So he moved townward, reluctantly indeed, but he did move.

MOST emphatically Jennison would not move immediately on Full House. There was too much interest shown in him here to justify his going now. And his judgment asserted that it arose largely from the false assumption that he was here on an errand of justice, sent by the governor of the territory, Angus Bryam. And though without credentials from the governor, the attempted assassination had converted him into an ambassador for law in this strange town. So he rebuilt his fire and fried his fish with attention divided between their proper browning and an alert watchfulness that he might live long enough to eat them, once the cooking was finished.

As he ate he kept a wary eye on the slope from which had roared the cowardly shot. It rose rather abruptly back of the town and was in fact the continuing east wall of the Humble River canyon. Heavily wooded on its upper slopes, nearer the town, its trees were scattered irregularly with these interstices packed closely with bushes of varying size and a good dozen species. It was an ideal spot from which to ambush a man. Without knowledge of the motive, nevertheless, Jennison nuzzled the theory that the attacker, whatever his reason, was a denizen of the decaying town. With this idea embedded in his mind, he watched for the return of the native. In the course of a half hour's untiring vigil he felt that at least the cabin of the marauder had been identified. A slovenly hut on a straight line back from Overholtser's shop was elected to that dubious honor. At any rate, the man-high bushes that grew a solid mat up to its rear had certainly moved, a narrow path of swaying brush tops had strangely materialized and there was the scantiest of breezes. And because the door was on the town side, Jennison surmized entrance had been made through a rear window. While he fed his contraband pup more bacon, he kept that door in view. And had a certain reward. A nondescript in seedy clothes emerged from the cabin and in leisurely way walked down to Overholtser's shop. In his hand he was carrying some article, impossible of identification at that distance. Jennison was considering the wisdom or unwisdom of making the party at Overholtser's shop three instead of two when something of greater importance made for postponement.

A MAN in a light spring wagon had driven in from the See Hole Prairie and fording the shallow river had turned his placid team down into the street. Before Mudd's store he whoaed his horses to a stop, set his brake and wrapping his lines about the lever, went inside. Certainly his careless method of anchoring his team was a tribute to their staying qualities once they were put. He had passed within twenty feet of Jennison. That little man, the friendliest of souls, had given him greeting, but though the driver of the dependable team had looked Jennison squarely in the eyes, the cheery "Howdy" and complimentary wave of hand had received no encores

from the old man hunched forward there in the seat. Jennison had assessed him as old and that without a tinge of reproach. He reasoned simply from his gray hair, his grayer whiskers, the hunch to near deformity in his bent shoulders. That he was thin, with wrinkled ill fitting clothing, that his black hat seemed a full size too large, adds to, but does not exhaust the picture. The fact that he did not respond to Jennison's greeting weighed nothing against him, for brief though the meeting of their glances had been, Jennison had detected far more than sterile unfriendliness or perennial crabbiness in the old man's set stern features. Suspicion was written there indeed and that legibly, but lurking behind that was a harassed and distraught soul. And Jennison, a rare judge of men, did not err in this analysis of a man seen but for a fleeting moment. Here mental discussion ceased, for the old man had emerged from the store and he brought no viewable evidences that he had been a purchaser. He had emerged walking backward, Mudd following almost within touching distance. And the old man emerged orating in a high-pitched voice at the full capacity of a pair of no inconsiderable lungs.

"You're nothing but a damned flannel mouthed pious hypocrite," the old man broadcast, "and in cahoots with the widow Kodad for reasons I'll name to you. It's simply because——"

The projected revelation was blacked out momentarily by a resounding blow from Mudd's open hand, that drew blood freely nevertheless, and set the assaulted man spinning back against the store front. But the old man rallied valiantly to grapple with his massive antagonist while his shrill treble rose in screaming accusation.

"More than that you're a damned white livered coward and a liar, to boot. As for the widow——"

A blow to his frail chin coming from a balled fist drove him back violently against the wall once more, down which he slid slowly, a battered but still indomitable man. Two other men arrived before Jennison. Soorick and the man who had gone into Overholtser's shop. In fact both were present when the second sledge hammer blow had been struck. Yet neither attempted to prevent it, nor did its cowardly delivery seem to them deserving of censure or rebuke. In fact the fleet-footed man from the shop approved it highly if his wide grin was index of his state of mind. As for Soorick, his colorless face was as unexpressive as his silent tongue.

JENNISON would have arrived sooner had he not sprawled full length over his too companionable a dog, and had any further violence threatened, lead would certainly have outpaced his flying feet. So absorbed were the three that they did not hear his footfalls in the muffling dust of the street, nor did they see him until he shuttled out from behind the wagon and halted a dozen feet away. His was not a picture to suggest jesting, nor smiles, nor belligerent words. Even to an unversed man it was crystal clear that death was rapping at the gates. Now he faced them, darkly accusing, but when he spoke his tones were chillingly restrained as he summed up their several delinquencies and pronounced judgment.

"Corral litter is what I names you," he stated, "jest sweepin's frum the stables of hell, nothin' else. Mr. Mudd, I seed you knock down a man half your size and old enough to be your pappy. *And don't try to horn in with sobberin' excuses!* I'm givin' you a chanct to explain later. You're a 'don't' man, I'm hearin' who ain't got no vices. A man who'd do what you done is so low a litter of mangy coyotes wouldn't kennel with him. You're rotten frum toe to skull. No vices! Hell, you ain't got anything else. Fry them vices outen you and you'd shrivel up to the size of a man's fist. As fur you, Mr. Soorick, you're only a shade, if any, under Mr. Mudd. You was personally present but you didn't lift

a finger, nor stir that bull voice of yourn to stop it, nor rap Mr. Mudd over the head with your six-gun like a man 'ud a done after he knocked the old man down.

"And as fur you," he trained his batteries on the sightseer from Overholtser's shop, "you legged it like it was a Punch and Judy show you almost was missin' and you had that frog mouth of yourn spread in a grin so wide I figgered you'd swallered your years. But you're a brave man at that outen a doubt. Brave enough to hide up thar on the hill and try to pot-shot me with a rifle. And don't open that trap of yourn to start a denyin' lie. I seed you sneak back through the bushes and crawl into that winder at the back of your cabin! Yep," he ended all-inclusively, "you're all three buzzards and I'm fur sandin' out your kind. Two of you I notice wears guns out in sight and a holy hypocrite like Mr. Mudd is sure to have one smuggled on him some place. It's your ante."

THREE to one and yet he had cast it fairly into their teeth. There was no possible misinterpretation of his words. War was in the making, combat was in the air. And the choice was theirs to accept or reject. But they did not dare it and they did not argue. Here was a man thoroughly competent, yet thoroughly just. He would wait their move. Mudd shrugged his wide shoulders and walked back into his store with a deliberation very near to studied insolence. Soorick without a flicker on his inscrutable face turned about and proceeded to his saloon. The third retired also without words, but with more haste than dignity, still clutching in his hand a new martingale with which super dandies decked their horses. Jennison and the old man held the field. The only casualty was now on his feet, a bit groggy but blazingly defiant. Getting his bearings, he was lurching resolutely toward the door with the avowal that he would knock Mudd hell-west and crooked, when Jennison restrained him.

"Forgit it, Dad," he counseled. "You ain't able so to do. Besides that, how's your jaw tackle?"

With the grudging admission that Jennison was right, the old man turned about to inspect his adviser while he ran a gnarly finger delicately across the point of his jaw. Now he reported. "Appears to be all there yet. But I sure got slammed right on the nub, at that."

"She's well padded with whiskers," Jennison observed with a grin. "Is that the reason you grow 'em?"

"Never figgered it that way before," the other admitted, "but I reckon I'm lucky I wasn't clean shaved."

Now he looked at Jennison in a speculative way.

"How'd you get into the game?" he asked with plenty of interest. "I remember you were feeding your face up yonder when I drove by and the next time I remember seeing you, you were making the three take water. There must have been a little time between when I didn't know what was going on. When'd you arrive?"

Jennison told him in his modest way, but the old man promptly filled in the gaps. He held out his hand.

"You're a man," and he climaxed Western praise in those three words. "And Lot Mellis, that's me, is proud to shake hands with you. But you'll feel damned lonesome if you stick around here," he asserted bitterly. "Some people live here, but damned if I'm sure there's a man among them. What did you say your name was?"

"Mr. Mellis," Jennison chuckled, "you're shakin' hands with Jim Hood, recent come to this camp. I ain't been here but a few hours, but your opinion and mine ain't more'n a mile apart. And I hope you don't put me down as a curiosity cat, but what started the rumpus between you and Mudd?"

THE old man's face clouded at the question and the harassed look noted once before by Jennison returned.

"I'll tell you," and he seemed to fumble for words. "It's like this—well the plain facts are, Mr. Hood, that me and the boys have run out of grub out on my place. A bunch of steers I was planning to drive up to Full House done disappeared. Well—" he stopped as if in doubt, but Jennison shrewdly filled out the sentence.

"The plain facts is, Mr. Mellis, that bein' short of money this minute, you ask Mudd fur credit and he turned you down flat like the skunk he undoubted is."

"That's the truth," Mellis nodded slowly. "Well, I'll have to drive on up to Full House and see what I can do. Much obliged, Mr. Hood. So long."

"Whoa," Jennison bade him in equine phraseology. "What's the reason we cain't git provinder offen that freight wagon pullin' in yander? He'd be histed to save haulin' a part of this load on to Full House. Let's stop him."

"You said *'we'?"* Mellis reminded him doubtfully.

"I so did," Jennison assured him. "I've got more money than I need and I'd likta loan you what you need fur grub. Hey," he veered to address the freighter who had just stopped his twelve mule team before Mudd's store. "Me and my pardner here wants to buy you out nearly. What's the chances?"

"Best in the world," the freighter answered jovially. "And prices no object, I gather."

"Not so as you could notice it," Jennison grinned back. Then he turned to the flustered Mellis. "Pardner," said he, "you do the buyin'.

"You know better what we need than I do. But don't skimp none on kind nor amount. And remember. *This* time, *I* do the payin'. Hop to it."

The look of gratitude Mellis cast at Jennison was warranted to warm the heart of a wooden Indian. Then he ranged his team alongside the freight wagon and the transfer was on. Jennison made but one suggestion.

"Have you," he queried, "any yaller cling peaches?"

"I've got a dozen boxes," the freighter admitted, "but they're down deep in my trailer. Kinda hard to get at, you understand."

"Well," Jennison persisted, "I've done set my swaller fur some yaller clings. Should you be willin' to dig a case out, I'll pay what you ask and no questions, neither."

"I reckon you're used to having your way," the freighter capitulated. "All right, I'll get a case, but it holds a dozen quart cans and—"

"Price ain't no object," Jennison cut him off. "This is my special treat day."

With the spring wagon loaded to the danger point, Jennison paid the towering bill, then the old man mounted the seat and drove the complaining wagon up to Jennison's bivouac. Here he turned to Jennison.

"I'd like almighty if you'd come out and stay with me awhile," he said earnestly. "You've done me such a noble turn that I'd sure like to get acquainted with you. Can you spare the time?"

"I've sure got a lotta time to spare," Jennison smiled genially. "Yep, I believe I'll take you up on that invite, Mr. Mellis, if you can stand fur my dog."

"Hell and I'd tell a man," Mellis beamed. "I can't keep a dog, nowise. Damned wolves eat 'em as fast as I can get a new one. Sure your dog's welcome."

"Mebby he won't figger the welcome's so hot," Jennison grinned as he began saddling his horse. Breaking camp was a simple affair and within ten minutes they were on their way, the pup frisking ahead after the manner of a dog without responsibilities or cares. And Mellis drove at a slow walk, Jennison riding at his elbow, so that conversation might flourish.

ONCE they had crossed the thin stream, the road divided in three ply fashion. One branch now apparently unused, veered

to the right, a second ran straight ahead, the third along which they now traveled angled somewhat to the left. Each road within a mile of the river terminated at a house and the familiar outbuildings found on cattle ranches with auxiliary corrals as if by an afterthought. Had a crow flown from the most southern to the most northern of the three houses he need have covered little more than a half mile. All were in Western parlance "within whooping distance" of each other. Jennison's companion indicated with his whip stock the house farthest to the north, that is to say to their right hand.

"That was brother Amon's place," he identified, "and the center one was brother Tod's. They sold out some two years ago about, to a widow woman named Kodad."

"What did they sell fur?" Jennison puzzled. "In my ramblin's seems to me I never lit eyes onto a finer cattle country. That bunch grass sure oughta make a cow brute laff out loud. Mebby the winters are bad though."

"By the average the winters ain't hard," Mellis answered. "We've only had one when we lost stock from the cold and snow. That ain't why they sold out."

"What made 'em then?" Jennison asked the direct question.

"Two or three things," his companion explained. "They both had itchy feet and had for some time. You know how it is with some people."

Jennison, perpetual victim of an insatiable wanderlust, grinned broadly at the remark.

"I sure oughta," he nodded, "bein' troubled all my life bad with same disease."

"Well," Mellis continued, "that was a big reason. Then the widow offered them an extry fancy price. But I figger the biggest reason after all was them damned Siwashes flitting around in them mountains. You seldom seen 'em, but you knew they were there just the same. Yes, I figger the Injuns were the biggest reason though Amon or Tod would have been the last person on earth to admit it."

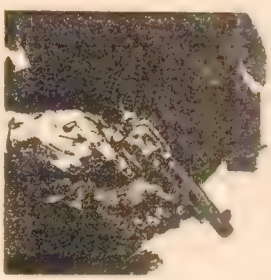
"You say you don't see them renegades," Jennison asked curiously. "How do you know they're thar then?"

"Mr. Hood," Mellis answered thoughtfully, "I've had glimpses of *two* in my five years here and my land butts up square against them Harpold Mountains. But," he added, "in the past year they've showed themselves more often, though you never see 'em close. Up on the sides of the mountains generally. And they've got ahold of a gun or so now. It used to be arrows, flint headed and poisoned."

"Rattlesnake poison likely," Jennison suggested. "I've seen 'em poison arrows and also gather their poison. Ever see it did?"

"Never have," Mellis answered. "How do they go about it?"

"THE time I seen it," Jennison replied, "a buck corralled a six foot diamond back and then pushed at him a chunk of deer liver fastened to a long stick. Mr. Snake would strike, coil up and strike agin, till I reckon the Injun figgered the old boy had used up his ammunition, then he let the rattler crawl off. Injuns as a general rule don't kill rattlers. Well, the buck got his quiver of arrows and smeared



the heads into that bit liver, then he laid 'em out to dry, up too, where nothin' could git at 'em. They say the poison don't last very long, but when she's fresh, gittin' nipped by one of them arrows is jest like gittin' bit by the snake."

"That's the way these renegades have

held their hunting grounds," Mellis took up the story. "You can see it's a powerful rough country and they've kept people out, you bet. Of course an army could root 'em out, but it wouldn't be easy at that. And there's never been enough men here to do it, even if they wanted to. It's lava country and little or no signs showing of gold, anyway on the outside of the mountains. Might be up the little creek that runs out from the See Hole Gap, but nobody living knows."

"You say *livin'*, I notice," Jennison reminded him.

"I was thinking of some prospectors," Mellis amplified, "seven all told, who walked in through the Gap and never walked out again. About four years ago. I remember because me and my brother tried to persuade them not to dare it. But you know some men. They poohpoohed the notion even when the Injuns begun sending up signal smokes from a half dozen different outlooks at once. The Gap is on brother Tod's land, or was till he sold out, anyway. All three of us and some of our men went along with them to within a mile of the See Hole Gap. There we stopped, but they went on. They never came back as I've already said, nor their burros neither. None of us ever seen one of them alive again. But one of Tod's men, a day or so later found one of them miners a mile or so this side of the Gap, but deader than a salt mackerel. And he had an arrow sticking between his shoulders. He wasn't a pretty sight, I can tell you."

"I've seen it," Jennison nodded, "and as you say, it ain't purty. Did they ever feather any of your boys?"

"They got one of my men the first year I was here," Mellis informed him. "He was always curious about them renegades and inclined to scoff at bows and arrows when he carried a Remington, as well as a pistol. He used to slide over against the end of my range and scout around hoping to get a shot at an Injun. Well, poor boy, he paid for his curiosity with his life, only he got a full half dozen of them arrows. Believe me, its been hard ever since to get one of my boys within a mile of the mountains, any of my brother's either after two young hellions, one of Amon's men and the other Tod's, rode into the See Hole Gap. Started, maybe I'd better say, for they hadn't gotten a hundred yards when hell broke loose. Luck was with them, for while both their horses got hit, they escaped. But one, who wore a heavy elk skin coat, got an arrow through the coat where it puckers just below the arm. Both horses died. Since then nobody's been close enough unless an Injun had a bow that 'ud carry a mile."

JENNISON turned to face Mellis squarely.

"How do you explain about Mudd?" he asked. "They tell he goes and comes as he damn pleases."

"I can't explain it," and Mellis shook his head in honest bewilderment. "But he does go in there right through that See Hole Gap with a pack train of burros. Bill Soorick goes with him to the Gap, but no further. Lordy! I don't know how he manages it. And he won't tell you either. But I do know this—when they get within say a half mile, they stop and flash some signals with a hand mirror. It means something sure enough, and must be strong medicine, but I wouldn't chance it."

"She's plain writ he knows something about Injuns we don't," Jennison said sagely.

"Sure does," Mellis agreed. "Well, here we are."

They had pulled up before the house as Mellis made the statement. Houses of its sort were legion in the primitive West. Built of unsquared, unpealed logs, low as to stature with squat stick and mud chimney, flue to a wide mouthed rock fireplace, it would have received no medals for charm, though possibly for picturesqueness.

The roof was made of shakes, split from

straight grained fir. The floor would be dirt, packed to the feel and consistency of asphalt macadam. At the corner was a shallow well, its yard high curb constructed of logs, notched together at the corners. On the curb ledge rested an iron hooped bucket, a five gallon syrup keg to be exact, geared with a rope to a rock balanced sweep. Behind the house and for all practical purposes attached, were a few indifferent sheds, for the most part open ended, made of poles and roofed in haphazard fashion with brush weighted down with rocks against the violence of occasional winds. To state that there were pole corrals is not unlike remarking that sugar is sweet.

There was not a bush, or tree, flowers, or chickens to be seen, certain evidence that no woman had planned the homestead nor had since intruded into its barren disarray. In the unfenced front yard was browsing a half grown black tailed deer, captured by one of the cowboys and raised painstakingly by hand. Jennison's pup frisked up full of curiosity and the will to play, to retreat incontinently before the threat of the buck's budding horns. Jennison chuckled at his dog's well timed retreat.

"Where'd you get your pet?" he queried.

"One of the boys found him when he probably wasn't more than a week old," Mellis explained. "Had a hell of a time raising him till he got big enough to eat grass. The boys would rope a wild cow, leg tie her and while one of them milked her, the others would be plenty busy fighting off the rest of the cattle. You've seen it maybe."

"More times than sevrul," Bat Jennison grinned reminiscently. "The bellerin's and belly whoopin's of a mad cow when she's hog tied fur outdoor milkin's is sure something to dream about, though she's nothin' to the creepy noises they emit when they git a whiff of fresh blood. I always figgered that to be the most ungodly noise man ever heerd."

"Certainly so," Mellis admitted. "And I heard it once when I was under a dead saddle horse with a broke leg. I'll tell you about it some time if you'll make me think of it. Too long a tale now."

"I'll remind you," Jennison promised. "I've got one to swap only it wasn't personal to me."

WHILE they chatted, they unloaded the spring wagon and carried the supplies into the house. And now Mellis was reminded of the unusual manner of the purchase.

"Mr. Hood," he said apologetically, "I guess I ain't thanked you yet for lending me the money to pay for this grub. Anyway I do now. Besides I want to give you my note of hand with interest, say fifteen or twenty percent. That's the going rate here, but I won't stand on it. What you did for a perfect stranger is about the most generous thing I've run into in a mighty long time. How much shall I write the note for? You never said how much you paid out and I didn't notice."

"Damned if I know myself," and Jennison told the exact truth. "I didn't pay much attention neither, I reckon. Fact is I was intrusted in the fodder which I had a hunch I'd help eat. As fur a note, I don't want it. I won't be here long enough to collect it probable and when you git in money, turn it over to somebody who needs it. You'll be payin' me that way. But what you say about intrust makes me think. Fellers back east would figger twenty percent was kinda high. Hell, I've seen men pay fifty, yes sixty percent at Walla Walla and other pints and you too, I bet. But I never yit took intrust and ain't startin' with you. Nor no note neither."

"Well, I know pretty well what everything cost," Mellis pursued the subject stubbornly, "and we can figger it up. And as for the note—"

"Let's forgit it, anyway," Bat Jennison stalled, "till we go out and take care of our hosses and my pup, also. That black

tail may have chased him up a tree by now."

"You're the generoust man I ever ran into," Mellis declared unreservedly. "And I mean it."

"Leave it thar, Mr. Mellis," Jennison insisted in genuine confusion. "I reckon that my few, if any, good deeds wouldn't stack up very high alongside of my t'otherly."

Jennison's prediction that his pup would probably be up a tree proved true in a modified way, for he had taken refuge under the front of the wagon while the buck threatened him mildly with stampings of his dainty hoofs. Mellis reached out, took the belligerent deer by the ear, turned him around and spatted him across the rump.

"Don't mean anything," he apologized. "Like as not they'll be romping together before the day's over. But how in the world did you start out with a pup?"

"I didn't," Jennison answered. "I picked him up in Humble."

Then while they unhitched the team and led them and Sunflower back to the barn lot, he told briefly of how he had saved the dog from the storekeeper.

"The man's clean crazy," he added. "Why he had the look of a stark ravin' lunatic when I stopped him. And that Soorick told me that he hates chipmunks! What kind of a damned stew pot is that Humble town anyway? Is it a mad house entire, or what?"

"Sometimes," Mellis said soberly, "I've wondered. Mudd is a queer customer. Makes me think of the people the Scriptures call Pharasees. Says something about making the inside of the cup clean while outside—outside——" He halted in confusion, the graphic condemnation lost. Not so Jennison, for out of bold pari-memory he gallantly essayed the role of exact expositor.

"I'm rememberin' them words of Holy Writ," he declared exuberantly, "and it says 'outside is ravelin' wolves' which I take to mean them bit with hydrophopia or mebby worse. That's the way I figger Mudd and Soorick."

"Mudd never uses a gun, though," the old man reported, "and don't carry one unless it's pretty well hid. Just the same, when I called him a hypocrite I meant it. That's the way I figger him, though I've got to admit I ain't got any proof of it."

"'Ceptin' him refusin' you a little credit," Jennison recalled. "How about Soorick?"

"He's a dangerous man," Mellis asserted without reservations. "The fastest man with a pistol I ever saw shoot and the best shot, too. Yes, he's dangerous. You ought to see him draw, Mr. Hood. You wouldn't believe a man could get a gun into action that quick."

JENNISON, gunman extraordinary, was not impressed.

"Mebby I'll ask him to show me some day," he said dryly. "Is here where you said to stall my pony?"

"I reckon I'd better think about dinner," Mellis remarked as they walked back toward the house. "The boys will be rambling in pretty quick. How are you? Ready to eat?"

Jennison snapped open the case of his heavy silver watch and glanced at the face. It was eleven a.m.

"I et breakfast crowdin' four this morning," he informed Mellis, "and a couple of middlin' sized trout jest before you rolled into town. Yep, I'll be ready by the time you and me git the forage onto the table. Eatin' reglar is one of my best holts."

Their range was a tiny sheet iron stove, rusted and warped as was the habit of those frail cookeries, its pipe thrust at rakish angle into a tin tumble in the shake roof. Why they did not burn down promptly every cabin so equipped will ever remain one of the unsolved mysteries of the West. Certain occupations seem to loosen tongues and promote intimacies and the preparation of a meal ranks high, indeed. So while

they rattled pans and skillets, Mellis gave Jennison a vivid synopsis of five years of living on the See Hole Prairie, three packed with thrills and pleasure, the fourth rather colorless, the fifth well strutted with troubles pointing inexorably to swift disaster.

In that first three years the brothers had built up their herds, disposing of their surplus steers chiefly at Lewiston, headquarters for the miners who were flocking into the rich Idaho placers. Meantime the stage route through the Humble River Canyon was opened up and Humble itself arose as an incident. An added reason was the brief stir occasioned by the discovery of thin placer gravels in a mile radius of the town. Quickly exhausted by the whites, it still furnished a precarious livelihood to a pair of patient Chinese.

At the end of three years, the brothers Lot and Amon sold their holdings to the widow Kodad. Another year witnessed the arrival of Enoch Mudd, followed a month or two later by Dave Overholtser and Bill Soorick, though to Mellis' mind, there was no previous acquaintanceship between the three. And while he did not like the unladylike widow, their relations had been coolly cordial for the first year of their joint occupancy of the prairie. Then things had changed and trouble arose.

"I began to lose cattle," he made the case specific. "As you'd know probably, we don't keep a close count on our stock. We let 'em range as they please and they get mixed naturally, drifting about as cows will. It didn't make any difference as long as my brothers were here, anyway. If my steers rambled down on their range, they didn't care no more than I did about theirs. When we got ready to market we rounded up a bunch and trailed 'em to Lewiston generally before we tried to cut out our different brands. And it worked sort of that way for a time after the widow took over, though she was always considerable against this range mingling. But as I say, it didn't amount to any real trouble between us, anyway not at first. Finally though, when once she'd found a bunch of her prime beef steers clean up in a coulee at the far end of my range she got wrought up. And she accused me of stealing her cattle. I'd lost some already myself or my boys figgered I had at any rate and in consequence I was touchy on the subject."

"Reckon you and that widder woman had some words likely," Jennison speculated.

"Well, if we didn't," Mellis remembered with a wry smile, "no man and woman ever did, though I tried to be a gentleman. Mrs. Kodad, who ain't my idee of a lady lived up to specifications. She warned me to keep off her range and my cattle, too. Said she'd shoot me or my boys if we ever did and my cows also."

"Is she a man of her word?" Jennison grinned.

"I'd say she is," Mellis assured him with feeling. "She or her men gunned for my foreman when he rode over onto her range to drive back some of my stock."

"Did he drive 'em back?" Bat Jennison asked interestedly.

"You bet he did," Mellis obeyed his foreman's staying qualities with relish. "And he battled them right back. You'll like him, Mr. Hood."

"From what you relate," Bat Jennison nodded, "I'm bettin' I will. Go on with your lariat plaitin'."

"WELL," Mellis continued, "that rumpus set me thinking. I'd been losing steers for some time, anyway the boys thought so and a few days, maybe two weeks later, there wasn't any doubt about it. A hundred head of steers ready for the market disappeared. When we found it out, we looked of course. I even led my men down onto the widow's land. She was gone, I'm admitting, but we couldn't find a trace. Then I had an idee. A couple of days before, her men had drove a big bunch of beef to Lewiston. Thinks I, maybe my steers is mixed up in *her* herd. So I

rode to Lewiston and begun looking round. Pretty soon I located the larkey who admitted he bought her cows. One of them damned crooked butchers, you've seen likely. He was pretty hostile, but I prodded around till I found some hides, fresh took, carrying *my brand.*"

"Looked like you had something," Jennison declared.

"Looked like is all," Mellis snorted. "That damned butcher swore he'd bought 'em from a man who said he was one of my boys with a written order signed by me, giving him the right to sell 'em. And he had that said order, too! Sure, it was forged, but how could I prove it? She'd had one of her men write it, of course."

"You came back a rarin', I bet," Jennison asserted.

"I did, sure enough," Mellis agreed, "and by the time I got to Humble I'd made up my mind. I wrote a letter to Governor Bryam at Boise City and asked him to send over somebody to clean up this mess or else there was going to be war. I ain't heard a word from the damned governor, nor seen any signs of an officer, *unless it's you.*"

"I ain't no ossifer," Bat Jennison said firmly. "And how long ago did you write?"

"Say two months ago," Mellis told him. "And I'm damned sorry you ain't the officer. You strike me as exactly the kind of a man for the governor to send."

"You say the governor never wrote," Jennison said thoughtfully. "Where's your postoffice here?"

"There ain't any postoffice exactly," Mellis explained, "but the stage stand keeper, Bud Wallis, acts as one. Don't suppose a letter a week comes here, anyway. He swears he's never seen a letter from the governor for me, and I've no reason to doubt Bud. The governor's just throwed me down."

"I ain't so sure, Mr. Mellis," Jennison said reflectively. Now he described the man whom he had found hanged, sent, so Soorick asserted, by him to see Mellis. But Mellis shook his head. He had not seen this self-announced seeker for a job on a cattle ranch. Nor had he any information relative to the other two men whom Overholtser had said were hanged some time before this, the third victim. Mellis admitted that he had heard rumors of the lynchings of the two, but that was all.

Humble, he added, was a tough town where men came and went, seeming transients, who were in Mellis' judgment thugs and road agents. The stage route from Humble to Full House was a dangerous thoroughfare to travelers, especially if they carried much gold dust. And some of the freighters were men with records that would not stand scrutiny.

"Overholtser is a square man, I think," he pronounced in tentative fashion. "Mudd, too," he conceded reluctantly, "though I admit I hate his kind."

THREE horsemen had arrived, the tattooing hoofbeats riding hard over the tail of his final sentence. The men dismounted before the door, hung their chaps and spurs over their saddle horns and bowlegged their way inside. Introductions were perfunctory. Jennison learned, however, that the tall solemn looking foreman was Melchizedek Botts, called Mel, of course; the fat dour face man was Lute; the young redhead was Frank. If the last two possessed surnames there was no vocal evidence of the fact. Frontier table dates were for eating, not conversation, and these five introduced no startling innovations in that well settled routine. Yet they did not eat unvexed by interruptions, because they were in a state of chronic haste, but rather because they considered the table a place

for stowing away food, that lengthened leisure might follow. So presently they filed outside to sit with their backs braced against the wall while they smoked and gossiped, though Jennison first must gorge his pup with the ample table leavings.

"Boss," the foreman announced between puffs on a self rolled cigarette, "we've lost some more cows."

"The hell you say!" Mellis exclaimed wrathfully. "How do you know?"

"Because," the foreman told him, "that bunch of thirty steers we were going to start for Full House tomorrow is gone. You know we sorta had 'em bunched in that coulee out here about three miles. Well, they were missing when we rode out there this morning. The boys and me have done a lot of scouting round since, but we can't find hide nor hair of them steers."

"That damned Kodad female's been busy again," Mellis bristled.

"Somebody has sure as hell, but maybe it ain't the widow," Botts said placatingly. "There's a lot of crooked business going on here that we don't know all about. Remember, Lot, that some of the widow's cows was undoubted mixed up in our cows in the butcher's pen at Full House? And our cows likewise at Lewiston with hers or so it looks."

"Hell," the man named Lute cut in, "what's the new idee of figgering the widow so damned innocent all of a sudden? Looks funny to me."

The tall foreman began to unwind and the sound of battle was in his quiet words:

"Lute," he stated, "I ain't sure just what you're meaning, so I'd like for you to make it plain."

LUTE, nothing daunted was likewise on his feet, but before he could reduce his veiled suspicions to concrete terms, Jennison intervened.

"Boys," he said whimsically, "we've gotta damned small army, even includin' my dog and we ain't a goin' to help Mr. Mellis none by no minus operations. I jest happened in on this town bein' set to make Full House by tonight. But I kinda got tangled up in these goin' ons the foreman's jest mentioned, and I'm plannin' to put in with you boys and see if we cain't have a spoonful of facts outen some damned poor tailin's. You boys have had your teeth set on edge by things happenin' right along that you cain't figger out. Still and but if we hang together I'm bettin' we'll unriddle this rebus. She'll be hard to come at should we do otherwise."

He had a way with him, this little gray eyed man, and the two cowboys promptly dropped their ruffled feathers.

"Sure, that's right," Lute conceded. "I pull back what I said, Mel."

"And I pull back what I said," Botts echoed. "We've got enough to put us on the peck, Mr. Hood, as you've said. And I'm sure glad you're going to put in with us. This damned thing has got us faded and no mistake."

"Well," Jennison said buoyantly, "I've seen some deep wells, but never one outen a bottom and I've traveled some damned long trails, but never one that didn't have a bend in it some place. I figger this'll prove that way. I'm going to git my saddle hoss and ride out onto the range with you three boys. Whilst I look the layout over, you can tell me what you've seen and know. My guess is light'll shine outen it. And Mr. Mellis, should you not want to go, mebby you'll kinda keep a eye out fur my dog. I'm afraid your range cows wouldn't take kindly to that pup."

"I'm going along," Mellis made a double announcement, "and we'll shut your dog up in the cabin. It's about the only safe place for him that I can think of while we're gone."

Recall to mind the simile used at the beginning of the story. The See Hole Prairie is a giant half moon, its straight or western boundary the twenty mile wall of the Harpold Mountains, its curved side to the east, with the Humble River tangent to the bulge, at the town of Humble. Mel-

lis held the southern third of the valley, Mrs. Kodad the northern two-thirds. His land abutted on the mountains for about seven miles, with the See Hole Gap some three miles north of his north range line, and ten miles directly west from Humble.

FROM the Mellis ranchhouse, they rode west by south. The prairie gave every indication that it had once been the bed of a deep lake whose waters had drained away through the break in the Humble River Canyon, immediately in front of the town. It was remarkably flat. Its most lordly elevation probably did not rise fifty feet above the valley floor. Yet there were a few shallow depressions, tiny coulees and miniature box canyons, examples of the eroding power of spring branches or violent thunder showers. It was covered with a splendid growth of bunch grass, wild forage *par excellence* for cattle and horses. Occasionally they passed small bands of cattle, chiefly cows and calves, steers notable for their absence. The trade of the cattle rustler had plainly flourished on the Mellis range.

Gradually they were approaching the Harpold Mountains. Like the Caucasus Mountains, they rose sheer from the prairie floor without the usual buttressing support of outrider foothills. They were in fact, successive outflows of lava, each of enormous depth, so that its front presented the appearance of steps built for Titans, if those mythical giants could have mounted stair steps a hundred feet to a tread. Farther back, the mountains seemed to level off somewhat to give footing to a dense forest of fire, tamaracks and pines. Mellis declared that the only passage, at least for an animal other than a mountain goat, was the See Hole Gap. Jennison viewing the stupendous barrier now at close range, was ready to concede the statements without debate. Nor was he disposed to doubt that a handful of Indians armed only with bows and arrows could hold this natural fortress against any reasonable number of invaders. And he hoped that he might catch a glimpse of these tameless sons of the mountains. It was a hope soon to be gratified.

They had ridden quite close to the terraced rampart when the foreman pulled up his horse and pointed aloft.

"There's what you wanted to see, Mr. Hood," he directed, "on that third ledge by that white rock. Must be an easy place to reach, for I've seen a scout there several times in the past few weeks."

Jennison followed that signboard finger, located his man, then unbuckling a side of his *cantinas*, drew out a pair of field glasses. A moment's toying with the focal rod and he held the high perched lookout in full review. Dressed in buckskin, face daubed with vermilion, he wore a head dress of feathers fashioned like a halo, the plumes thrust upright. Armed or not, Jennison could not tell. With a queer introspective look in his eyes, Jennison passed the binoculars to Mellis with the remark:

"I figger it's a good quarter mile to that gent, but them glasses fetches out his high points, regardless. But you'll mebby hafta give the focus rod a twist to bring him out clear."

Mellis looked, passed the glasses to Botts, thence they traveled the route till they returned to Jennison's hands.

"I'd likta see that bird walk," he remarked as he focused once more on the gaudy one.

"Think he'd fall off, maybe?" Mellis hazarded. "He wouldn't any more than a mountain goat."

Without answering, Jennison studied the befeathered scout once more.

"Yep," he repeated, "I'd sure likta see him walk."

He was to see him walk and that briefly.

THE scout on his lofty perch had been watching them since first they had drawn rein. Yet even through the field glasses there was nothing to indicate that he entertained for this group of prying

horsemen anything but a casual interest. They had made no hostile gestures and indeed the distance and elevation would have rendered the man a highly elusive target. But now as Jennison made this final remark, the outlook's interest shifted. He had turned to face a clump of low bushes at a rough guess twenty yards away, that grew at the juncture of the towering back cliff and the ledge upon which he stood. To Jennison watching his maneuvers keenly, it was clear that that mass of shrubbery had intrigued the scout into a closer inspection. And his slow advance was not due to insecurity of footage for a team could have been driven along the flat ledge. No. Something that suggested peril was masked there. Half the distance and the horsemen were witness to an amazing tragedy, its cause for the moment unguessed. The man had jerked to a halt, bent backward as if from a sudden blow and with a twisting half turn, collapsed. Nor to Jennison, holding the prostrate body under his binoculars was there evidence of the slightest movement. Now was disclosed the active agent in that drama if not the means. A man had risen from behind that screen of bushes, had looked long at the motionless figure and as if satisfied strolled away. And by every token he was an Indian! Jennison lowered his binoculars.

"I reckon," he remarked, "you seen what I seen only not quite so plain. Since we didn't see no smoke, nor hear no noise, he musta aced him with a arrow. Mighta done it with a knife, but I'm bettin' it was bow and arrow work."

"But why the hell would he kill another Injun?" Mellis wondered.

"Grudge mebby," Jennison speculated idly. "Injuns pay off grudges same as white men."

"I noticed," the foreman made a shrewd observation, "he didn't have on a feather head dress like the other one."

"Nope," Jennison agreed, "nor a shirt neither. Fact is he didn't show up much agin that cliff."

It was within an hour of sunset when they approached the Mellis homestead. Over at the Kodad ranch they noticed a group of horsemen and now the party, headed by the widow, moved this way. Jennison had a strong premonition that it was far from being a neighborly call. Not much. Two less than a dozen cowpunchers rode at her back and they carried rifles across the pommels of their saddles. Plainly war was astir on the See Hole Prairie. Without turning Jennison glanced at Mellis and his three. They rode very straight in the saddle now, eyes level and unafraid. And they could not know that at the owner's elbow rode Bat Jennison, the most famed gunman in the West. Or would it have made any difference to those men? In all probability, no. Mellis was their boss and that was sufficient. There were neither greetings nor salutations when the two groups met before the house. Mrs. Kodad opened the session with no lost motions and there was iron firmness in her tones, fit vehicle for an inflexible will.

"Lot Mellis," she had stated without circumlocution, "See Hole Prairie's not big enough to hold us both and *I'm* staying."

"Just like me," Mellis retorted, "for *I'm* staying."

"No," she disagreed, and her voice had stepped up a tone. "You're going. But I'll be fairer with you than you deserve. I'll buy your range and stock. I've got the money right here with me and the deal goes through *now*. I'm paying you ten thousand dollars which is more than it's worth. But peace of mind is worth something to me. I've got the bill of sale right here. I'll give you ten minutes time to make up your mind and sign it."

"Then what?" Mellis flung out the swift question ballasted well with insolence.

"Well," she answered with a significant flip of a thumb toward her grim faced men, "you see my boys there. Either you sign as I've said or we'll run you off. I'm not neighboring another hour with a cattle rustler."

COMBAT stood poised on tiptoe. One fighting word from either principal and guns would be spitting. Jennison proposed to forestall it. Silencing Mellis with a gesture, he addressed the militant widow.

"Mrs. Kodad," he said with an ingratiating smile, "jest before you arrove with your money and your already wrote bill of sale me and Mr. Mellis was talkin' about that very thing."

While Mellis gulped and Mrs. Kodad stared, Jennison rattled on.

"You see I jest come out from Lewiston fur that reason. I'm a lawyer, Mr. Mellis' lawyer in fact and my name's Hood."

"Hood," the widow repeated sceptically. "I know a lot of people in Lewiston and I never heard of you."

"I'm new come thar," Jennison explained breezily. "Formerly I was at Walla Walla."

"You don't look like a lawyer," she said with uncomplimentary directness, "nor talk like one either. I don't believe you ever studied law."

"Ma'am," Jennison asserted blandly, "you're a lot mistook. I know the English lawyer Blackrock personal and I've fought cases agin Dan'l Webster. Therefore, seein' as I'm out here on this very case, your dealin's must be with me. I ain't sayin' my client here, Mr. Mellis, won't sell, but we've gottta have forty-eight hours in which to thumb it over mental. That's also final."

"Final!" Mrs. Kodad said explosively. "Why you little tomtit, I'll tell you what's final. If Lot Mellis don't sign the bill of sale and start packing inside of five minutes, I'll turn my boys loose."

It was a very different Jennison who spoke now and his voice no longer placating, had in it the rustle of silk caressed by a light breeze.

"Mrs. Kodad," said he, "agin you're mistook. You and your boys ain't movin' Mr. Mellis per force or threats. You oughta, likely do, think considrable of your boys. Mistakes you now make will take their toll outen them, not you. Bein' a lady, no bullet will tag you less by mistake, but your boys is men. Don't put it down to braggin' fur it's gospel truth. I'm probable moren a match fur all of your boys. Think about that and see if you cain't let this pot simmer fur forty-eight hours like I said."

Mrs. Kodad looked long and thoughtfully at this compelling gray eyed stranger. A keen judge of men, she realized that here was no bluffing braggart, but every sign indicated that barring her will was one of those imperial gunmen, who might well make good his quiet assertion that he was more than a match for her men. And in her rough fashion she cherished these loyal cowboys. Who he was she did not know. Then she remembered. Could it be that he was Bat Jennison! She leaned forward impulsively.

"You're no lawyer," she declared, "you're——"

"Mrs. Kodad," Bat Jennison interrupted swiftly, "fur a lot of reasons, should you have a hunch, kindly warehouse that hunch fur that preordained forty-eight hours."

AGAIN she studied her man, nodded at an instinct confirmed, and without a word wheeled her horse and led a bewildered band of cowpunchers toward home. Four men there, just as bewildered, sat their horses and stared at Jennison, the wonder worker.

"Mr. Hood," Frank the redhead laughed excitedly, "you bluffed the old hellcat. I didn't figger it could be done, either. I sure thought we were in for a rumpus."

"I didn't bluff her," Jennison disagreed gravely. "She used her judgment. And that woman's got judgment. Moren that I believe she's square as a die."

It was a strange doctrine to proclaim to the Mellis outfit, who for months had treasured the belief that the widow was a cattle thief, no less. His declaration spread an amazed silence over the group. Had he gone over to the enemy? Was the scene

just enacted a rehearsed performance for their future undoing? And who was this stranger, anyway, who had unasked taken charge of the critical situation and accomplished a dubious peace? It was an uneasy silence, also very real, filled with vague suspicion and ready to crash into high words. Their nerves had been tauted too long to take his unsupported assertions meekly and without vocal objections. Keenly aware of the smoldering hostility and making just assessment of their reasons, Jennison proceeded patiently to elaborate his convictions as to the widow's probity and probable fairness.

"My notion is," he explained, "that both you and the widder have been put on. And it's been done smart. Whilst you and the widder have been busy pintin' suspicious fingers at each other, these [illegible]t boys have been gittin' away with your mutual cows. You admit some of her steers was mixed with yourn up at Full House, but you don't know how that said mixin' was accomplished. Likewise some of your beef showed up at Lewiston with hers, or in such a close way it looks like it. You're square, Mr. Mellis. Should the widder be square also, she's got to feel at you like you feel at her. Yep, I'm bettin' heavy that somebody has gravied their potatoes at both your expense. And don't ask me who," he forestalled a very pertinent question, "nor how neither. But I've gotta strong hunch onto both them pints, but

it'll take a little while to work it out. That's why I said forty-eight hours to the widder."

"Mr. Hood," Mellis said frankly, "the way you put it pretty nearly convinces me about her. It could be just as you say. Still, admitting that only makes the rest of our troubles muddier. Now I don't know what to think, only I know I'm about ruined financially."

"Well," Jennison said philosophically, "I've lugged some purty nice trout outen some damned muddy water and my notion is that the fishin's goin' to be good and also rapid. Outside of that I'd likta see how my pup's comported of himself."

SUPPER over, the three cowboys left to do some chores while Mellis and Jennison tidied up the dishes and table and Mellis even departed from his general rule and swept the floor. It was growing dusk when Jennison lounged outside and sat down on a willow bench. As he filled his pipe, his pup wriggled over in search of assurance that he still stood high with his rescuer. Sundry pattings and scratchings having impressed this on his canine mind, he settled down within easy reaching distance while he thumped the ground with his stumpy tail, not in regular way, but in rather broken rhythm. Presently the foreman came back to the house and announced casually that he and Frank were "holing" up for the night, but that Lute was riding over to Humble for some smoking tobacco. In the course of time, Mellis, pipe in hand appeared in the doorway where Jennison stopped him with a question:

"Before you jine me why don't you snuff that candle out?"

"What for?" Mellis puzzled.

"Fur two good and ample reasons," Bat Jennison answered. "In the first place it saves the candle and in the second place we won't make so good targets should some sharpshooter wish to take a crack at us."

"Oh, all right," Mellis conceded as he stepped back and puffed out the tallow dip. "But I've never been shot at."

"I have," Jennison said dryly as Mellis felt his way to a seat beside his wary guest. Now he made a remark that seemed to suggest nothing of moment. "I suppose the man at the widder's elbow today was her foreman."

"Her foreman's laid up with a busted leg," Mellis answered. "That was just one of her boys, John Sims."

"Ever notice that him and your man, Lute, look alike?" Jennison queried.

"Well, I reckon they do," Mellis agreed meditatively. "Both are swarthy and about the same height and weight."

"They're alike as two peas frum the same pod," Jennison asserted. "Should they be brothers, they'd not look different."

"Well," Mellis chuckled, "that would be funny. One's named John Sims and my man's Luke Bostick."

"That's what *they* say," Jennison countered. "Did they arrive here together, if you know?"

"No," Mellis answered. "Sims has been here close to a year, I imagine. Lute's only been here about nine months. More than that those two men carry more hate for the other outfit than the widow or I do, even. I've had to warn Lute a dozen times about his disposition to pick fights with the widow's men. I'm always worried when he rides over to town alone like he's done tonight, for fear he'll run into some of her boys."

"You can set your worry pan onto the shelf fur awhile, anyway," Jennison said dryly. "Lute didn't ride straight to town. When he got to the ford, he skirted down through them bushes and cut back to the Kodad place! I watched him and I know."

"It was nearly dark," Mellis suggested rather pointedly.

"Mr. Mellis," Jennison informed the stubborn boss, "I've got uncommon good eyes, 'specially of nights. I watched him and I know. Ears, too," he added in lowered tones. "Listen."

TOO befuddled to think coherently, let alone talk, Mellis followed the low spoken advice. Now he did hear something, for a time its source undetermined, a sound coming out of the open prairie from the general direction of the widow's home. Increasing gradually in clearness, it was registered definitely at length as footfalls. Then a form blurred the starlit sky and a voice came out of the semi-obscurity to hail him.

"Hello the house!" came the time honored Western salutation. "Hello, Mr. Mellis. This is John Sims."

"Hello, Sims," Mellis responded. "Come on in. There's nothing to fall over. I'm setting out in front of the house here."

The man drew nearer.

"I want to talk with Mr. Hood," he announced. "Is he around, Mr. Mellis?"

"I'm right here, Mr. Sims," Jennison identified himself without stirring.

"I can't see you," his visitor declared as he peered in the direction from which the voice had come.

"Well, I can see you, anyway," Jennison stressed for reasons of his own. "What's on your mental stomach? Also how comes it you're afoot? Cowboys usual ride to breakfast even."

"My pony's lame in the stiffle joint," Sims explained plausibly. "Besides it's not over a quarter of a mile between these places. As for why I'm here, it's like this. Mrs. Kodad sent me. She wants you to come over right now. I don't know what's up, but she's in an awful stew about something. She said it was a life and death matter. Ready?"

"Yep," Jennison answered placidly, "I'm ready—to stay right here."

"You mean you won't come tonight?" Incredulity and dismay were well blended in the exclamation.

"Jest that," Jennison assured him. "Tell the widder to hold herself. Nothin's goin' to happen tonight."

"You're not afraid to go surely?" Scorn had now become a trace-mate of incredulity.

"Mr. Sims," Jennison told the self proclaimed emissary of a widow in distress, "as I done told you already, I can see you. I've gotta pistol trained right now onto your belt buckle which I can also see.

Should you crave to learn whether I can nib that said buckle with a bullet, jest stick around and talk some more. If not—"

Jennison did not finish out the sentence. The ambassador was departing. Yet, not hastily. He was going, that was all. Jennison knuckled Mellis' knee for silence, then he slipped from the bench and laid his ear upon the ground. The retreating footsteps were telegraphed along that quaint sounding board much more clearly than through the air. Now for a long moment the sound ceased, then was resumed, augmented by at least a second pair of feet. Now Jennison proceeded to add to his host's bewilderment.

"Mr. Mellis," he queried, "do you know any poems or such or speeches, even?"

"Poems, or—speeches?" Mellis stuttered. "Why in the world—what do you mean?"

"Poems or speeches," Jennison repeated patiently. "Say like 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,' or 'The boy stood on the burnin' deck,' or 'Give me liberty or give me death?' No, and I ain't crazy, like your gurglin's seggest. Here's the pint, Mr. Mellis. I'm aimin' to do some scoutin' round tonight and I don't want people to know it. I'm guessin' that round here purty close is a man, or two mebby, whose business is to keep track of me. Should him or them figger you and me as settin' here gossipin', my get away would be made easier."

"I get it," Mellis said. "You want me to sit here and put on a show by myself."

"Yep," Jennison nodded, "only you'll hafta do it mumblin' low and play two parts, also. Can you swing it?"

"You bet I can," and Mellis entered into the shrewd game with enthusiasm. "But honest, Mr. Hood, ain't you after all an officer sent over here by Governor Bryam?"

"Nope," Jennison denied once more, "but from the way this thing's shapin' up, I might jest as well be."

IT WAS ten o'clock when he led his saddle pony out of the Mellis barn lot. The night was cloudless and in the dustless, smoke free air the stars glittered like points of living fire. That is the exact word for it. Some time after midnight, a moon in its final quarter would intrude its pale light, but now the stars held an uncontested stage. For a few minutes Jennison rode straight south, then he swung east on a flat arc. Humble was to be his first port of call and he chose to come to anchorage unpiloted and unannounced. And he did not cross the river at the ford, but some yards above it, near the spot where he had caught his second trout. Here was thick brush, in which to conceal his pony. Sunflower had been on many a similar excursion with his master and if a horse can imbibe discretion by association, Sunflower had quaffed that very necessary drink. Rarely would he respond to a challenging whinny even in the daytime. Jennison would have sworn a nineteen jointed oath that his wise little pony had never offended at night.

So Jennison left him and made his way with care out to where the brush thinned into the roadway. Almost directly across was the stage stand, a smoky lantern swinging from a rusty hook its sole arc light. A half dozen rods nearer to Full House, some freighters held carnival about a roaring campfire. Beyond these two illuminations he could see not a single light in store or shop, saloon or cabin. Plainly the business men here did not reckon prosperity in night trading.

While he halted there in the shadows, a horseman galloped in from the prairie, splashed through the ford and in purposeful way crossed the road. Patently he was making for the cabin above Overholtser's shop and which, in Jennison's opinion, housed the man who a few hours before had ambushed him. To Jennison it seemed far more than sheer coincidence, this night rendezvous, of the man from the range and this able cannonader. And being here for information, the cabin seemed to present an immediate and fertile field for intensive cultivation. Accordingly he was only a few yards away when the rider dis-

mounted and rounding the cabin rapped on a low set and shuttered window. As Jennison glided to the corner, the shutter opened, the man stepped in and the unique door closed behind him. Yet he entered in darkness though the cabin had certainly held a light and now again, once the newcomer was inside. Caution seemed to have spoken its last word here. There were men in the house, four Jennison counted eventually, unless one was a ventriloquist. Now as he listened avidly at a favoring crevice, a man by every count the late comer, made ear tingling report:

"The widow says he's Bat Jennison!"

SO Mrs. Kodad had blabbed! Had it been inadvertent, or deliberate, or forced? Jennison would have given something to know, though the question must needs rest for the present.

"The hell he is!" another exclaimed. "And now that I come to think about it, I'll bet she's right."

"Well," a third commented in a voice well freighted with alarm, "Governor Bryam *has* done something now. Setting that streak of double geared lightning on our trail means a swift finish for us. If we've got the sense God give a sheep we'll skedaddle tonight. Where is he now?"

"Setting out in front of Lot Mellis' house," came the comforting, if temporary answer. "Him and Mellis are chattering like a couple of magpies. And he's being watched, don't worry about that."

"You can't watch that snake," the alarmist asserted baldly. "Wouldn't surprise me if he was right outside now with his ear cocked to a hole. You fellers don't know him, but I was in Dusty when he cleared it up."

"If you think he's outside," the fourth man suggested coldly, "go out and look. No? Well, then try acting like a full grown man for a while. I've heard about this superman till it's turned my stomach. Of course he's a good man with a pistol, but what of it? So was Fred Geer. But Geer died with his neck in a noose didn't he?"

"How are you going to manage?"

"That, my lambkin is *my* problem and *my* business!"

"But you've planned to pull out in a day or so anyway," one insisted. "Why not tonight?"

"We'll leave when I'm ready," the leader declared coldly, "and not because Mr. Jennison happened along. I wouldn't pull out of here for a few hours for fifty thousand dollars."

"You've sighted something big," one of the man said greedily. "You wouldn't say it that way if you hadn't. What is it?"

"I'll tell you," the other answered. "Get your heads together. That's it. Now listen."

JENNISON had an occasional infirmity that attacked with disconcerting acuteness, and on occasions so inopportunely that it seemed directed by an utterly perverse imp. And now as he set himself eagerly to hear, the spasm seized him as if with a diabolical cunning. Will power availed nothing against the tauted muscles and when the leg cramp had passed, the coveted information had been detailed and the meeting was on its way to adjournment. He had scarcely dragged himself into the bushes when the four were vacating their council chamber by their favorite exit, the rear window. And though they passed within reaching distance he could not distinguish their faces. Yet after all, it mattered nothing, for he knew.

He crawled from the bushes and mumbling phrases that did not constitute a hymn to love, limped over to his pony. Clambering into the saddle, he rode out of town, prairie way. Across the creek, however, he did not continue on toward Mellis', but instead pointed west by north. His present path if projected would have passed between the widow's house and the abandoned home of Amon Mellis. And as he rode, he cursed the exasperating cramp

Its unseasonable onslaught had prevented his hearing the leader's final words back there at the cabin. What single thing could be of such transcendent importance that he would not desert Humble within the next few hours even for fifty thousand dollars? Jennison would have given something to know. And though he turned and returned the tantalizing problem many a time during the night, a plausible answer somehow escaped him.

It was shading daylight when he rode into the Mellis corral. First caring for his tired horse, he spread his blankets on a stack butt of blue joint hay and within two minutes was asleep. An hour later Mellis' lusty voice awoke him with an enticing summons to breakfast. No laggard at that game, Jennison arrived hard on the heels of Botts and Frank. The man Lute did not show in the line-up and it quickly developed that he had not returned from town. Suggested reasons ranged all the way from drunk, a gambling session, murder, or unromantic desertion. Mellis scoffed at the latter for cause. Lute had six months wages due, the boss stated. That in itself seemed an irrefutable argument. Jennison listened but made no present comments. With him it was no matter for guessing. He knew. When the two went out to saddle their horses Jennison made a suggestion to Mellis.

"Go and tell the boys to be sure to be back by noon. I'll tell you why later."

"Just as you say," Mellis was agreeable. "As a usual thing they always are, but I'll make it double sure."

WHEN he returned to the house, Jennison mystified his host by inviting him to accompany him on an immediate visit to the widow. And as they trudged the quarter mile to her house, Jennison told him of his night's adventure up to the time he had ridden out of town following his defeat at the hands of his ancient enemy, the leg cramp. That brief segment of his possible story had reduced Mellis to amazed and blasphemous incoherency. The widow met them at the door and Mellis at any rate was considerably surprised to see that her right arm was in a sling. A far different woman was Mrs. Kodad now from the fiery grenadier of the evening before. Her first words were an attempted apology.

"Mr. Jennison," she began, "I didn't mean to tell——"

"Don't say it, ma'am," Jennison interrupted gallantly. "Pain is a good and sufficient talk starter. Did he break your arm or only strain it?"

"It's not broken," she assured him, "though I thought it was at first. Will you come in?"

"Ma'am," Jennison answered for the two, "I've gotta talk with you mighty private where nobody but us three can possibly hear. Mebby if you feel well enough, we'd best set down out yander on that bench under the trees."

"Of course," she said, "I don't propose to let a little sprain upset me."

"No pioneer woman would," Jennison declared, "and I figger you fit that solid."

By the time the three sat down, Mellis had won sufficient decision over his amazement to permit a hope sponsored question.

"Did I hear right?" he queried. "Did Mrs. Kodad call you *Bat Jennison?*"

"You heard correct," Jennison assured him quietly.

"Well, then I say hallelujah," Mellis said jubilantly. "Now I know everything will work out. Why for years I've been hearing about——"

"Wait," Jennison begged in honest confusion. "We've gotta lot of things more

important to talk about than that. And now, ma'am," he turned to Mrs. Kodad, "did you make out the skunk who twisted your arm?"

"He was masked," she said regretfully, "and he whispered. No, I didn't recognize him."

"Well, it's no great matter," Jennison assured her. "I know, anyway, only I don't know his name. Listen, I'll tell you. Mr. Mellis has already heerd it, but it'll stand rehearin'."

At the end of his story he asked a question.

"Did you see John Sims this morning?"

"He wasn't at breakfast," she answered slowly. "Come to think of it, one of the boys said he was gone last night and hadn't come back yet."

"He ain't comin' back," Jennison informed her. "Lute Bostick over at Mr. Mellises is gone also. They're brothers if I don't miss my guess, even though sailin' under diffrunt names. And while I'm plowin' I might as well tell you both that you and Mr. Mellis lost some more cattle last night."

AT FOUR that afternoon, Jennison rode away from the Mellis cabin. His destination was Humble, more specifically the three-ply shop of Dave Overholtser. This master of trades was in, so Jennison dropped his reins to the ground and entered. Overholtser looked up and started visibly as he recognized his caller. Now without preliminaries Jennison asked a flat question, with explanatory preface.

"Yesterday morning," he reminded the strangely agitated man, "you and me buried that feller who'd been hung. I asked you if you knowed him and you said you'd seen him. In fact you told me when we talked thar at your cabin, that you'd sold him a martingale. That sounded likely, but up at the graveyard I asked you agin and that time you said you'd sold him a *pair of spurs*. What *did* you sell him."

"A pair of spurs," Overholtser affirmed glibly. "I sold the martingale to Sid Plum."

"You mean the man who lives in that nighest cabin?" Jennison elaborated the matter of identity.

"Sure, that's him," Overholtser nodded. "It didn't fit the chest of his horse and so he brought it back yesterday. I traded a quirt for it. There it is hanging on the nail."

Jennison looked at the man in disgust.

"Mr. Overholtser," he said coldly, "you are a lair, but a damned pore one at that. I seen that Plum bring that martingale back. You know it was the one you sold to that pore boy. Plum didn't buy it, he stole it offen the boy's hoss after Plum and his gang lynched Fred. Geer's his name. Fred Geer, Governor Bryam sent him over here to put a stop to the stealin's and so forth and they killed him. Outen a doubt you've been threatened by 'em if you told anything. And you ain't a crook. You're jest a coward. Try bein' brave fur a change. What did you sell to Geer?"

"That martingale." It was all but a whisper. He swallowed hard, then went on in a voice increasingly steady. "You've got the facts just as they happened. I don't know how you know, but you're right. As for being a coward, I reckon I am. Maybe though if you'd seen what I've seen in the past year and heard what I've heard, you wouldn't blame me so hard. This town has been hell!"

"That's a thing I can believe easy," Jennison assured him. "And as fur the coward part, forgit I said it. When did you see this Sid Plum last?"

"Along about sunup," Overholtser answered. "He rode by my cabin with Bud Wallis heading toward Lewiston."

"And they ain't come back?"

"If they have, I didn't see them."

"Did you notice whether they kept straight on down the road?"

"I didn't. Gets brushy just a few rods past my cabin."

"I remember," Jennison nodded. "Just

about where I found Geer hung. And now, Mr. Overholtser, why was you so upset when I walked in on you jest now?"

"Don't you know?" Overholtser countered in evident wonder. "Haven't you heard about it and what's being said?"

Jennison looked hard at the flustered man.

"Mr. Overholtser," he said finally, "riddles don't help none. Say out plain jest what you mean."

"Don't seem possible you haven't heard," Overholtser provisoed, "but here it is. A stage carrying gold dust from Full House was held up this morning early, just about a mile up the road from Humble. Carried, they say, around sixty thousand dollars."

"Held up you say?"

"Not only that," Overholtser amplified, "but the driver and both guards were killed. And from appearances they never were given a chance to surrender, but were shot down from ambush."

"I ain't surprised," was Jennison's brief comment. "But thar's more to it yit. Tell it to me."

"Well," Overholtser complied reluctantly, "naturally they looked around and talked about who'd done it. And—"

"Somebody laid it onto me," Jennison finished the fumbling sentence. "Who?"

"It's as you put it," Overholtser admitted, "though I hope you don't think I believe it."

"I asked you who said it," Jennison rapped back. "I ain't carin' a damn who believes it."

"Bill Soorick. He said only one man had been there according to the tracks and he said it was all rifle work and that you were the most wonderful shot with a rifle he'd ever seen."

"Thanks," Jennison said shortly. "Well, I'm wanderin' up to have a chat with Mr. Soorick."

"You can't see him now," Overholtser told him.

"Why."

"Because, him and Mr. Mudd left about noon with a pack train of burros headed for the Injun country. Soorick never goes beyond the Gap, but they never come back till the next day."

IT WAS nine o'clock that night when Jennison with Mellis and his two cowboys dismounted before Mrs. Kodad's gate. The fence was already lined with saddled horses, their rumps limned darkly against the star-filled sky. In the front yard they found the widow with her men save the recreant John Sims. Greetings were brief for they had work to do this night. But first Jennison had a tale to tell and instructions to give. So they gathered round him, grim-faced, resolute, ready for any emergency, none more so than the indomitable widow. The men draped themselves on the front steps, sat cross-legged on the grass, while the widow sat in state in a willow chair. Cigarettes glowed and Jennison's pipe did not add noticeably to the soft perfume from the widow's well-tended flowers. Now he rapped the ashes from his briar and dropped it in a side pocket.

"Boys," he began, "Mrs. Kodad and Mr. Mellis know the heft of what I'm goin' to tell you, but not all. I reckon you're intrusted to know what we're night ridin' about and to where. Well, I'll tell you. We're goin' to bring back some of the cows that's been stole late offen this range and clean up the gang of rustlers who's been carryin' it on fur a year past. And before you can ask I'll tell you that we're goin' to find them cows hid up in the neatest little valley you ever laid eyes on. Said valley is say a short two miles back in them Harpold Mountains and its tight little end gate is that See Hole Gap. Should you imagine a big enough funnel, little end down, you'll git a mental picture of that valley. And now wait further before you begin fannin' questions my way. Up out of that valley on the fur side runs a trail which ends a hundred miles away at the Fort Buell Injun Reservation. Thar's a thousand Injuns on that said Reservation

which Uncle Sam feeds per a beef contractor who I figger is a high grade crook, because he's been buyin' your stole cattle now fur about a year."

"Mr. Hood," Melchizedek Botts broke in a bit impatiently, "that's a good tale and I'd enjoy it any time but now. But honest, I can't figger why you picked tonight to tell it. May sound funny to you, but it don't sound funny to me. I came here with Lot and I've been here ever since. There ain't anybody in them mountains but Injuns and never has been. Why you yourself saw two only yesterday. Well, of course," he qualified, "Mudd has been in there, but God knows how he does it. But he don't *live* in there, you bet. He drops his presents and *klatawahs!*"

"YOU'RE mistook, Mr. Botts," Jennison disagreed calmly. "And yesterday I didn't see *two* Injuns. I did see one, though. The man that got killed was a white man, one of the cattle rustlers masqueradin' as a Injun. I knew it the minute he walked, though I'd figgered it out already frum his feather headdress. Injuns don't tog out that way fur everyday skylarkin'. The one who done the killin' we seen yesterday is a Injun and the only one left alive in them mountains. Fur that matter, he's been the only one there fur a year past."

"Then that damned fool Mudd," one of Mrs. Kodad's men said bitterly, "has been feeding them rustlers for a year now while he figgered he was taking care of them pore Injuns. That's all the sense he's got anyway."

"She would so look," Jennison admitted.

"No wonder he would come and go," another remarked feelingly. *"God protected him!* I've heard him say it a dozen times. Them rustlers must have had a lot of chuckles out of his capers. But how do you know there's only one Injun left?"

"He told me so last night. And now if you'll hold yourselves in a minute, I'll unwind my bobbin as fast as I can. First I'll tell you about them rustlers and how they uprooted the Injuns. They'd heard about this cattle country over here and they'd heard about them Injuns, also. She's a tale common all over Idaho territory and has been fur years. Well, them rustlers had been workin' over around Fort Buell and they gotta figgerin' on your cattle here. By scoutin' round they found that they could git into this little valley I've jest told you about, but first their leader figgered that they'll hafta make way with the Injuns. And they done it in about as cruel and heartless a way as I've ever run into. She's hard to believe that white men could sink that low but thar ain't no doubt about it. Here's how they come at it. They'd learned that the Injuns, thar was only twenty includin' the papooses, ranged this end of the mountains. No white men had ever been in the back part of the mountains and consequent, the Injuns didn't keep a watch thar. Well, two of the gang of rustlers sneaked into that little valley from the Fort Buell side. They had a couple of pack mares loaded with supplies, say sugar especial and a couple of demijohns of whiskey. They unloaded their stuff, made a campfire, a big one, too, then laid back and watched. Of course the Injuns seen the smoke and came to look, cautious like and all together. Then the two men put on a good show like they was scared to death. They cut loose with their guns, then skedaddled. They'd hid a extry pair of saddle hosses back up the trail and consequent was safe enough. But they left their stuff, pack mares, everything. The Injuns final swarmed in, every single blessed soul but one man who happened to be on guard clean down at the Gap. And that grub and whiskey was *poisoned.* Arsenic, I reckon. When this one Injun found 'em they was dead even down to the papooses. Brown sugar fingered into their little mouths by their mammies, I figger. Well, the rustlers took over, but that one Injun has caused them considerable grief. And they didn't all work frum that end of the line. They

planted some of their men right here. They're the coyotes who mixed up your stock at Lewiston and agin at Full House, likewise out here on the range. One of their men was Sid Plum at Humble, John Sims was another and Lute Bostick was another. I figger them last two as brothers, but I don't know it fur a fact."

FERVID exclamations of surprise and grunts of disbelief met this amazing indictment of perfidy on the part of their two comrades. Jennison listened patiently and at the end countered with this calm observation.

"Before you boys are many hours older, you're goin' to learn a lot of new surprises. So jest leave it thar fur the present. Now I'll go on and finish about that sole Injun. You see when I spotted that white man makin' pertend as a Injun, I gotta hunch. Followin' that hunch, about midnight last night I slid in through that said See Hole Gap and landed in that valley I was tellin' you about. I seen the cows they've got bunched thar ready fur the next drive to Fort Buell. Fact is as I came out they was drivin' in some more which they'd fresh stole. But as they ain't startin' fur Fort Buell till tomorrow mornin' I figger all them cows will be back here feedin' their faces where they've gotta good right to feed 'em before the sun gits very high tomorrow. And now about the Injun. Thar was a campfire with one man tendin' it. The others was off on this last cattle rustlin' stunt. And he was more or less keepin' watch over the Injun who by some hook or crook they'd captured. Anyway, thar he was tied to a tree and I *mean* tied. Well, I slipped round and belted the guard over the head and untied the Injun. Nope, I didn't cut him loose—you can see why. Then I laid a good healthy limb handy so as they'd figger Mr. Injun done his own gittin' away. Then I slipped away and the Injun slipped also and bein' an Injun, he was grateful, 'specially when he found I could talk Nez Perce same as he did. He's meetin' us tonight at moonrise at the Gap to guide us in."

IT WAS one o'clock. The covert scrutiny of his watch by the momentary flare of a winking match had so declared to Bat Jennison. Above the eastern range of mountains was even then appearing the slanting crest of an old moon. It would shine straight into the See Hole Gap, like a dim light hung at the entrance to an underground crypt. For that Gap was very narrow, with towering perpendicular walls and, unlighted, black as a fathomless well at midnight. But now with the moon, like the suddenly uncovered eye of a dark lantern pointing in exact focus on the gorge, darkness gave way to semi-obscurity. Sparkles played on the surface of the thin creek that rippled out from the hidden valley and threw in shadowy relief the pale walls. As they halted there by the mouth of the chattering creek, from somewhere within floated the call of the great barred owl. Silence fell, to be shattered by the clamor of a coyote near at hand and deceptively real, though it issued from Jennison's bearded lips. Moments that seemed long strolled by, then from the tunnel stepped the figure of a man. The Indian had kept tryst. Jennison dismounted and advanced to meet him.

"My brother has done well," he greeted the Indian in his own sonorous tongue. "Thou hast watched?"

"I have watched," the other answered. "But the men within the valley do not watch."

"What do they then?"

"They drink, they sing, they eat, they make merry," came the detailed reply. "And they know not that the song of death is even now ringing in their ears. They sleep not tonight, for tomorrow they think to leave this valley forever. It is true they leave it, my brother, but they know not the path they take."

"Doubtless thou hast spoken truth," Jennison answered. "Lead thou now the way

and I and these, my friends, will follow."

He turned to the group of riders clustered close behind.

"He's guidin' us in," he reported. "Foller close and ride single file and don't make no extry noises."

Leading his pony, Jennison followed hard on the moccasined heels of the guide. The stream filled the Gap from lip to lip, but was shallow, little more than boot heel deep in fact. For perhaps a hundred yards the passage led west as straight as an arrow, then it bent at right angles to the south. And here it was black indeed. But the shallow stream held its way in placid fashion, making footing easy, though accomplished by feeling, not by sight. Again the course veered, this time west by south. Already the walls were drawing steadily apart, disclosing dimly a trail between the stream and the close set cliff. A scant two miles from the See Hole Gap and they had entered the valley, visited by Jennison only the night before.

They stood on the floor of a vast natural stadium, its monolithic sides rising three-

quarters of a mile, its hypothetical playing field two thousand acres in extent. The walls sloped back abruptly, though there was certain footage for some venturesome trees and not a little brush. Perhaps two-thirds of the valley floor was, for all practical purposes free of trees and bushes. It had been a paradise for deer, a few elk, grouse, pheasants and rabbits without count. Where the party had now halted stood a thick grove of jack pine which extended up the slope at their left on a comparatively easy gradiant for perhaps a hundred yards.

"We'll take our hosses up on this slope," he told them, "and anchor 'em thar. The Injun tells me the outlaws have their hosses beyond their camp, which by the way, ain't moren four hundred yards from here. You can see the dance of their fire yonder over the trees. The Injun also tells me the cows is bedded down a good piece on above their horses. And you people are goin' to see some men who'll supprise you."

WITH the Indian guiding, they led their horses up the steep slope and tied them securely behind a heavy thicket of elk brush. Jennison had ample reasons for this place of concealment, which he now voiced.

"Hosses can smell a strange hoss a unreasonable distance, and outside of Sunflower, I never knowed one who had sense enough to keep his face shut when the smell of a strange hoss come flittin' round. And whilst them rustlers ain't even gotta guard out, they might, probable would, git suspicious if they heard a hoss nickerin' where they knowed they didn't have no hoss. And now if you've all got your rifles and so forth, we'll move closer. Only Mrs. Kodad, I still kinda wish you'd stayed at home. These gents is a hard bunch and you're like to hear words it ain't nice fur a lady to hear."

"Mr. Jennison," the widow answered in iron clad fashion, "I was raised in the West and I've seen and heard things a plenty before this. I'm here to stay. Quit worrying and lead on. I'm interested in getting a close view of the pelicans who stole my cows."

"All right, Ma'am," Jennison capitulated. "But don't never say I didn't warn you."

In the wake of the Indian, they moved on, taking advantage of the continuous screen of bushes to mask their advance. Yet their senses informed them of the ever increasing nearness of the outlaws. For as the Indian had said, they made merry. In

the still air, unvexed by competing sounds, their shouts, their roars of boisterous laughter, even ordinary bits of conversation, beat on their ears in strangely amplified way. Then in a lull, uprose a voice, and Jennison fancied that the hair on the widow's neck bristled as she listened. For it was the traitor John Sims exulting in his infamy.

"And the old biddy never tumbled to the fact that I was doublecrossing her and it all going on for a year just about."

"She was as smart, anyway," Lute Bostick entered the competition for dumbest bosses, "as the billy goat I rode for. Owes me six months wages, too. Well, I reckon the cows I run off last night will pay that."

"The widder's foolisher than Mellis," Sims cinched the medal for Mrs. Kodad with a final argument. "She's paid me."

FIFTY yards from the fire of the roistering men, the bushes came to an abrupt end. From behind this living screen they had a full view of the camp and the outlaws. The camp lay by the little creek in a grassy oval cleared by nature and assisted later by man. The only durable buildings were three or four crude lean-to's, open fronted toward the creek. They had been sufficient for the two springs and summers the rustlers had harbored here, for they had left the valley at the first threat of snow. About the lean-to's were scattered helter-skelter, saddles, blankets and bed rolls, ready for the final valley leave taking. Against the trees or leaning on bed rolls were rifles, all more or less within long reaching distance. The mammoth campfire flamed on the verge of the creek and the men lounged or sprawled or pranced about on the green carpet, as individual mood prompted. And they were drinking, all but one man. Mudd sat apart in silent aloofness so far as viewable or audible evidence offered proof. Near him were the *aparagos* which had been strutted with supplies at his store in Humble some dozen hours ago. What was he thinking now? Mellis, peering between two spread branches of a buck brush put the man's imagined thoughts into concrete form, mumbled Jennison's way.

"I'll bet a drink I ain't got on me," he hazarded, "that that damned old puritan is cussing blue blazes inside. The gullible old fool knows now that he's been took in all along. I'll bet it tastes bitterer than gall. And he's got to set there and see 'em drink and hear 'em swear. More than that he don't know what they'll do to him when they get ready to pull out. His life ain't worth a continental damn."

"I'll jine you in that said final remark," Jennison agreed guardedly. "The chances are all agin him."

Then Jennison's shoulders sagged. An unknown in bull-like fashion began roaring an interminable song of shaggy rhythm chorded to words obscene and shameless. Mrs. Kodad reached over and tapped the uncomfortable little man on the shoulder with a hard finger.

"Mr. Jennison," said she, "I heard that song before I was ten years old and I'm still a lady."

Jennison looked at his watch. It was two thirty-five. He had hardly miscalculated the length of time necessary to traverse the twisty dark gorge and reach their present point of observation. And it might have taken longer if the outlaws had set guards. Luck had aided them, or carelessness, or overconfidence. It would be an hour plus until daylight, and for daylight he must wait. And he must make no mistakes, overlook no advantages. There were eight outlaws, hard men, desperate men, to whom battle was as normal as breathing. And without doubt highly skilled in the use of firearms, cool under stress and impossible to stampede. Also Mudd. Jennison had thirteen and one of them was a woman! Of them all there were in all probability not two who could be classed as gunmen. Brave, willing, even daring to recklessness, but these qualities, however admirable, could not compensate for lack of experience un-

der fire. So he must move with circumspection. Yes. He must overthrow the outlaws, recover the stock and save, if possible, the lives of these likeable young cowboys. And the widow. She was his major problem, though to her own level way of thinking, his obvious concern for her passed comprehension. He drew the Indian a few yards aside and pointed west. There above the topmost ridge of the mountains rose up a slender peak, bathed now in moonlight. So would the first rays of the rising sun pick it out. Jennison spoke to him briefly, the Indian nodded and turning about disappeared like a phantom.

WHEN the Indian had disappeared on his mission, Jennison turned back to study once more the roisterous outlaws. And as he watched, a budding suspicion became certainty. Sid Plum and Bill Soorick were the chief merry makers. Theirs to turn hand springs, to whoop songs, to wrestle, but they were not drinking. Not quite literally could this statement be taken. But they drank sparingly, when the six others were considered. For the six men were maudlin drunk, especially Sims and Bostick and Bud Wallis, late stage employee to Humble. Queer conduct to be condoned or even permitted by their leader, when they planned to begin their trek from the valley at daybreak that very morning. Without question there was something deeper than surface probings revealed. Reasoning so, Jennison proceeded to lay out his final plans which the jubilee about the campfire made easy of accomplishment without fear that they might be heard.

"I've jest started the Injun to stampede the cows," he explained to the amazed group. "I figger it'll help to draw their attention off us so as we mebby can hold 'em up without a battle. Anyway, that's the way I figgered. I don't want to put any of you in the way of stoppin' a bullet if it can be managed. It's only a hour to daylight and I want to make everything plain to you. I'm takin' Botts and Mrs. Kodad's Saul, who she says is the best shot amongst her boys. In about fifteen minutes we'll be behind that big log which I figger ain't over twenty yards from their fire. I'm figgerin' onto supprise. Don't none of you pull a trigger 'less I pulls a trigger first. But if you hafta shoot, shoot to hit. Any two of them men could probable outshoot you all and I ain't castin' no reflections onto you when I say it. But their business has been to fight and yours to know and handle cows. I'd like almighty to git every one of you back home outen a scratch, if possible, so keep under cover all you can."

The log behind which he and his two companions would take shelter, was a huge pine, uprooted bodily by a recent storm. It lay parallel with the creek and as Jennison had said probably not over twenty steps away. It was perilously near the rustlers, but then Jennison was accustomed to peril. And though he did not say so, he proposed to bear the brunt of the battle if it came to war. The disturbing presence of Mrs. Kodad had all but disrupted his plans, so now he revamped them to fit the need that arose due to her stubborn insistence that she be personally present.

FIFTEEN minutes and the three crouched behind that perfect rampart and through a thick litter of buck brush studied the outlaw camp at microscopically short range. And as he viewed it critically, Jennison returned to his former conclusion. Something was in the making whose planned product he could not quite anticipate. It was he felt certain now, not accident but design that had left Soorick and Plum cold sober, while it stretched the six out sprawlingly drunk and helpless. The thought flitted through his brain that the scheme went no farther than desertion. That the two, at any rate, would decamp with the horses, arms and provisions, leaving the intoxicated men stranded here in the valley. And then with startling suddenness, something happened that even to Jen-

nison, superlatively informed as to the monstrous patterns assumed by cold blooded crimes, seemed utterly beyond example.

Of the six outlaws, four were now flat on their backs, one leaned on an unsteady elbow, one sat hunched over in drunken stupor. Soorick and Plum had drawn back somewhat, made a whispered agreement signed with a nod, then flashing out their pistols, leaped savagely to the slaughter. There was no defense. Death reaped its bloody harvest before leaden minds could grasp the nonhuman fact that they were being slain by their own comrades. Could Jennison have prevented the pitiless massacre?

The answer must be no. Possibly one or two of the final victims could have been saved, but only they. It had been too sudden of execution, the plans too well hidden. He could have issued a last second's protest, nothing more. At the first treacherous shot, Mellis half rose to be gripped by Mrs. Kodad's strong fingers.

"Squat down you fool," she said tensely. "Mr. Jennison said stay out till he waded in and he's made no move."

"Why don't he?" Mellis gasped. "That's a damnable butchery, nothing else."

"He said *wait,*" the widow replied in adamantine fashion. "And when Bat Jennison says wait, he means wait."

And Mudd had not stirred during the murderous attack, not even when the two executioners painstakingly made sure that their loathsome work was complete.

"I can't help feeling sorry for Mudd," Mellis muttered sympathetically. "He's made a terrible botch of his charity work, fool notion that it was. And he probably knows they plan to kill him, too. But I doubt if Mr. Jennison will stand for that. And I wonder when he plans to jump 'em. I see they're starting in to get breakfast which means they'll be pulling out pretty quick."

"He said daylight," Mrs. Kodad reminded Mellis, "and that means *daylight.*"

THE two murderers were now stirring together a hasty meal, in callous disregard of the bodies stretched out in contorted patterns only a few feet away. So far as Jennison observed, they had said never a word to Mudd, who still sat in deep contemplation and though the volunteer cooks talked briskly, their conversation held no words of regret, nor pity, nor shame. Not at all. They were spending money prodigally in fanciful ways and in distant cities, money to which they seemed to lay ownership as by indefensible right. And while they chatted, the white light of dawn touched the distant mountain peak that was to be the signal tower for the Indian. Only he was to wait for the sun, according to his solemn agreement with Jennison. And Jennison registered a mental doubt. Had the Indian heard the shots? If so, how would he interpret them? When at last the peak was tipped with fire, Jennison whispered tersely to his two companions. The meal had been cooked and from the pans three plates had been heaped high. Plainly these sodden desperadoes would feed Mudd, even though it were planned to be his final meal. Thus Mellis interpreted their actions to Mrs. Kodad.

It was pale day and time to act. Jennison paused. Soorick, plate in hand was approaching the sphinx that had been Mudd. Sphinx no longer, Mudd stood up and laughed! No gentle chuckle this, but a harsh roaring guffaw, followed by a revolting sentence.

"By God," he chortled, "you and Sid made us money fast with your six-guns. I wonder what Bat Jennison would have given to be here?"

Instantly Jennison leaped the fallen log, both pistols drawn.

"Hands up, you butchers!" he ordered. "You're covered by a dozen guns!"

It was high tragedy, with a dash of grotesque comedy. This neat trapping of the murderers, their hands freighted with tin plates when the cargo should have been

pistols. For a long stupefied moment they hesitated while Jennison's two companions scrambled out to join him and the bushes housing the rest of his army was mowed down by their plunging advance. Jennison could not wholly repress a brief grin at the sight. But it brought no responsive smiles from the killers. So they dropped their plates at Jennison's curt order and elevated their hands. Disarmed and seated under the guns of the vigilant cowboys, Soorick calmly rolled and lighted a cigarette, then he looked up at Jennison and chuckled.

"They tell me, Mr. Jennison, that you never make a mistake, but I can prove you do. Us three are all officers sent in here by Governor Bryam to clean up these rustlers. He said dead or alive and we've followed our own judgment. We've got quite a bunch of cattle corralled up here a mile or so which we were going to drive out as soon as it was light. We figgered Mr. Mellis and Mrs. Kodad could cut out their own cattle then. So as I've said, you do make mistakes. I know the governor well enough to tell you that he'll raise hell with you for interfering with his officers. He's particular about that."

"Outen a doubt, he would," Jennison conceded, *"should you be ossifers."*

"Well," Soorick laughed easily, "I guess I can convince you on that point. I've got credentials if you'll let me show them to you. Of course you'll understand that these are my deputies and that none of us are sailing under our real names. Mine if it would interest you is—"

"Fred Geer, likely," Jennison interrupted the plausible sounding tale. "Well, it so happens that I knowed Fred Geer, a web fingered boy you couldn't mistake. Poor boy, he got lynched a couple of nights ago at Humble. Of course you helped and Plum thar too. At any rate Plum stole the martingale offen Fred's hoss and traded it back next day to Overholtser who'd sold it only the day before to Fred. Yep. Mr. Soorick, I figger you as Fred Geer. One of you must also have the credentials of the first ossifer sent in here by the governor. The credentials of the judge was probably over your heads so you likely tossed 'em away. Or mebby Mr. Mudd took the judge's papers—he sure oughta have. And Mr. Mellis don't you and the widder snort disbelief. I'm doubtin' if Mr. Mudd'll jine you, anyway, when I finish. Now onto the breast of that hanged man, Fred Geer, was pinned these words 'Kurosity Kat.' I wondered about that paper. Wrappin' paper she looked, but finer than I'd ever seen used. But up at Mr. Mudd's store I found it! Undoubtless the scrap onto which that rebus was wrote came from thar. And don't interrupt me. That night I rode back into town. Natural I made fur Plum's cabin on account that he'd tried to shoot me that same morning. Three men were talking in thar and purty soon Plum himself arrove. He'd been out twistin' the information frum Mrs. Kodad that I was Bat Jennison. I listened jest like Bud Wallis said I likely was. And I heard Mr. Mudd say a thing that puzzled me and that I couldn't figger. He said that he wasn't goin' to leave fur twelve hours regardless, and he named a high price, fifty thousand dollars. Well, I didn't figger that out till I heard about the holdup of the treasure stage. Them ambushin' thugs got sixty thousand dollars in dust! And now Mr. Mellis should you still be nussin' doubts heft one or two of them said *aparagos.* I figger you'll be convinced."

Mudd, cool and impeturbable, looked up to ask indifferently, "And the answer is?"

"Hangin'."

"I thought so," Mudd replied. "May I request, however, that you spare my ears any long winded preaching about crimes and their just desserts. Death I don't mind, but ignorant sermonizing would be agony."

"Mr. Mudd," Bat Jennison said gravely, "notwithstandin', I'm givin' you men ten minutes to square yourselves with your Maker."

"The conventional gesture," Mudd

nodded. "You'd offend against custom otherwise. But in our case useless. However, I have one request. I'd be charmed to have the buxom widow adjust the noose. The caress of her fingers would make it a joy indeed."

"No," Jennison denied sternly. "And more'n that she ain't goin' to witness it, neither. Ma'am you take a couple of your boys and ride up and start the cattle homewards. You ain't stickin' round here no longer. Hear me! *Skedaddle!*"

AND the widow for the first time in many a long and stubborn year, obeyed. As she and her two reluctant retainers left for their horses, the bushes parted violently and the Indian was making rapid explanation to Jennison.

"I did not stampede the cattle because I heard shots."

"It is well," Jennison assured him, "for there is now no need." Then he asked a question that brought a glitter to the Indian's somber eyes. So it was that the execution was cogged to exact justice. The Indian noosed the ropes about the necks of the men who had murdered his people.

Two hours later, Jennison and the Indian stood alone at the entrance of the See Hole Gap. To Jennison's suggestion that he leave the valley, the Indian answered:

"I will remain. This land is mine though my people be gone. Yet I would that I had a dog. Then would I be content."

Jennison grinned in happy relief. For at the Mellis home he had a dog and he could not take that ungainly pup on his interminable wanderings.

"My brother," said he, "thy wish shall be granted. By midday I will return and with me a dog. I, even I, will give it thee."

Then a disturbing thought assailed him, for he remembered an Indian's fondness for cooked dog, garnished with herbs or otherwise. He turned to the Indian to say plainly, "This dog, should I give it thee, is to cherish, *not* to eat."

The Indian smiled, perhaps for the first time in many a joyless month.

"He would be to me a friend," he remarked. "Answer thou me then, little man."

Charleston Charley Had Received Fifty Thousand Dollars for a Fantastic Job—to Deliver a Man in a Coffin!

CLIMB IN MY COFFIN

By ALFRED BATSON

Author of "No Shots Fired," "Boy into Man," etc.

AS THE long train rocked and jolted through the sparse countryside—the fields flooded, the towns burned in China's "scorched earth" plan of retreating warfare—the tall innocent appearing foreigner in the seat by the window settled back with a sigh of mingled relief and boredom.

"What a change to be myself," his mind ran. "No phony baron or earl on this job; no anybody with a string of titles. But being Charleston Charley Prowell for the first time in longer than I can remember, is dull. There's not enough action for my taste."

Then he glanced around at the motley crowd of fellow passengers in the only coach the train carried. They were military men, mostly, in the olive-green of the Japanese army, several civilians who might be

colonists and others, better dressed, who looked to be officials in trade corporations. Regardless, the smoothest working confidence man in the Far East knew them all to be reservists, and as such, jealous guardians of the Mikado's new empire.

Suddenly a blank faced porter in a white coat came through. "How long before we arrive?" Charley asked.

The porter shook his head. "No spik English. S'cuse, pliss," he said.

Charley smothered a laugh, watched him hurry away to the end of the coach where he glanced furtively over his shoulder. And what Charley saw in his piggish, gimlet eyes was far removed from the bland look his face had worn a few moments before.

Giving his attention out the window again, Charley pretended to be oblivious of the measuring glance of a mufti-dressed Jap who sat opposite him, squinting over the top of a paper he professed to be reading.

"Ver' much dust," he volunteered with a sheepish grin on being discovered.

"Very dusty," Charley agreed.

He knew the man's concern in the dust that eddied and swirled through the coach. It was the same deep concern for the lone Occidental that had made every other passenger attempt to strike up a casual acquaintance with him in the hour since they had left Nanking.

Oh, the Jap secret service was smart—to their way of thinking. They weren't letting foreigners get into their lines without knowing everything about them. But the pay-off to all the cross-investigating, the covering of the same ground a dozen times, Charley ruminated with a wry grimace, was that *he was working for the Jap secret service himself!*

Yet the forces of the Rising Sun maintained so many spy bureaus that the whole thing was in confusion, with each trying to outdo the others.

The would-be quarry in this instance knew why these bungling amateurs were so persistent with him — because he'd purposely embarked on the wrong train and thrown them into a tumult.

HE'D been instructed to take the train that left in the afternoon, whereupon he'd lost no time in taking the one that left in the morning. Thereby he'd hoped he might find adventure. But the only adventure in the deal so far was that he'd been paid fifty thousand dollars solely on his word.

"You been in China long, yes?" the man plunged on.

"Several years," Charley replied, stifling a yawn.

"Ah," the Jap hissed. "Several years, eh? Ah, yes." Charley knew he was making mental note of it, to be checked at first opportunity with the statements he'd made to the other questioners.

"Chinese ver' crazy pipple, don' you t'ink?" the man asked suddenly.

"You'd think your people were the crazy ones," Charley thought as he nodded, "if you knew the roll I've been given for a job before I even started it."

Then, because he was tired and to avoid the inevitable probing the man was leading up to, Charley rested his head on the back of the cushion and closed his eyes.

But inwardly his brain was a seething turmoil, for of a sudden it had come to him that perhaps he was the crazy one in the deal. He was on a mission stranger than anything he'd ever attempted, and it didn't yet look right to him.

He had received the fifty thousand dollars to *deliver a man in a coffin!* Just that. It was fantastic, but most things that happened in China were fantastic—yet the money was already in his account in a foreign bank at Shanghai!

His mind went back to that afternoon in the rear of a Nanking tea shop when he'd had an appointment to meet a diminutive little Jap in civilians.

"Ito," the man said his name was.

But a liberal tip to the Chinese proprietor brought Charley the information that

he was Colonel Ito Unzi, recently sent from Tokyo to coordinate the various Japanese espionage branches.

"Woh, Ling-ping is the person we want you to get," Unzi said as Charley raised his cup quickly to mask his surprise. Touching the venerable Woh, Ling-ping would be like touching Confucius, only Woh was alive.

"We have investigate your career careful. We know you man of your sacred word; that you never kill anyone. We no ask you for kill now. But because Woh great man to Chinese masses, crazy pipple may want him body for worship when die. So we hire you for deliver to us in coffin."

"How will he die?" Charley sought, nonplussed.

Unzi shrugged. His eyes were hard. "Him old man. Mebbe him die by natural cause. Mebbe—who knows? Maskee. You no kill so what you care?"

"And where would I get a coffin in this devastated countryside?"

The Jap shrugged again. "Meet Woh an' you onnerstan'."

Charley let it go at that, on the surface. "I'm a vulture waiting for a corpse," he summed it up. "I'm merely to meet the great Woh, Ling-ping, then hang around until the grim reaper steps in." His blood chilled when another thought came to him. "The Japs wouldn't dare kill him. He's a God to three hundred million coolies. It would be like the British killing Gandhi. There'd be no peace in the country thereafter, ever. The Japs are too smart for that—they've got to have the masses with them if they hope to sell Jap goods." Then he sighed.

"If the Chinese masses knew the rumor that's being whispered around Nanking—! Ah, well, it's a grisley business, but the money is good."

YET there was more to Charley's acceptance than the money. There was a chance to do something for the Chinese cause, for he'd heard a story that Woh, Ling-ping was dickering with the invaders to head one of their puppet governments. The story went further that Woh was in the bag. If it was true, Charley thought that such a man was a traitor to his own people and deserved death.

"But I couldn't bring myself to do it," he vowed.

A conflicting part of it all was that there was nothing in Woh's career to give the tip that he might be an eventual traitor. Starting life as a poor coolie himself, he

had thrown in his lot with the immortal Sun, Yat-sen, China's George Washington. By the time independence was achieved he had raised himself to the rank of general and governor of a province. Thus he was no fool. Losing out in the political bickering that followed, he had retired and occupied himself with a study of the classics. Usually ousted generals raised armies and started revolts, with consequent loss to everyone save themselves. But old Woh became a student, and since students are held in high esteem and soldiers are scourges to be endured, he was accepted by the common people as something of a diety.

Now at last reports he was bargaining for a price on selling out. Charley thought he'd like to know just how far that bargaining had gone. And where was old Woh that he could negotiate with the Japs without his people knowing of it?

One thing, Charley began to wish he'd taken the train Unzi had told him to take. Adventure might have been aboard that one, for certainly there was none on this.

They pulled into a way station about noon and he got out by habit. But

he'd been over the antique buying gag so often that he had no trouble in making it sound convincing.

On leaving the crude guardhouse he ambled down the platform to take another look at the long line of flats attached to the lone coach. Several bore huge tanks that could only contain precious gasoline, others were piled high with wooden boxes bearing the stencil marks of American manufacturers—machine-gun bullets, enough for an entire corps. Then came several flats whose contents were covered by canvas. Returning to the head of the train his eyes fell on the drawn shades of the private compartment at the end of the coach. The occupant, he guessed, was a high Jap official anxious for secrecy.

The ruse was unsuccessful for a beggar woman was there moaning and crying, beating her head and rubbing her stomach in the usual fashion. As Charley approached, she hobbled off.

"Funny," he thought," she didn't ask me for anything."

Then he saw that one of the windows was raised briefly. He dismissed that as a coincidence when he watched the woman's retreating figure, for he pictured her as typical of a million Chinese made destitute by the armed might of the rising sun's forces.

Within a quarter hour he was back in his seat and they were rocking and jolting north again, ever closer to the Jap lines. Once a Nipponese warplane roared overhead, dropped down and ran parallel with them for some distance, then flashed a signal and disappeared.

"No need for this investigate," the Jap opposite him volunteered. "We have country all capture. We in supreme command."

"Yes," Charley agreed. "You're in command all right."

"But I tell you," the man said, leaning forward and lowering his voice to a whisper. "I am not in agreement on way my country has treated Chinese sometimes. I think too brutal. How you feel on that?"

Charley was not to be caught napping. "I'm a foreigner," he said smiling. "I'm neutral."

"Ah, nootral, eh. So how you feel about—?"

"Just now my throat is full of dust," Charley said, anticipating him. "I need a drink." With that he got up and went the length of the wobbling coach to the water cooler.

But as he held a paper cup to the faucet he noticed at his elbow a door leading to a sort of small baggage room. To the bogus lord an opened door was an invitation he could not ignore, and he glanced in. The opening was but an inch or so wide, but what Charleston Charley Prowell saw made his eyes narrow and his brain function at top speed.

A coffin was in there. An ornate, Chinese style coffin of heavy teak, resting on horses.

"By jove," he said inwardly, "they're sending the blasted thing up with me. I guess Unzo remembered what I said about possibly not being able to buy one. These devils are thorough. And the stage seems to be set."

He found another seat this time, but no sooner was he settled than the uniformed man across from him offered a cigarette. Charley refused it with thanks. To have accepted, he thought, would have been putting his foot in the trap that lay waiting.

The Jap, however, was of a different opinion. "You American, no?" he asked.

"Yes," Charley replied, "I'm an American."

"Ah, yiss. My name Igaki. Me colonel. Me ver' glad for make acquaintance. Me hope you tell pipple of America my country have capture North China and *war*, 'scuse," he corrected himself, "peaceful penetration most over."

"The people of America," Charley put in, wearied by it all, "have a feeling that the war will never be over because the Chinese will never stop fighting."

"Ah," Igaki laughed, "this ver' wrong.

You see for self how Mikado's soldiers have won eve't'ing. Look," he said bending forward and speaking earnestly, "if war not over how this train come north with fi' t'ousan' rifles in back cars, eh?"

"Rifles," Charley said, surprised. "I didn't think any rifles were on the flat cars."

"Ah, yiss. Rifles, machine-gun bullets, gasoline for airplanes an' two complete cars with fi' tons rice each."

"I guess you're right," Charley admitted. But inwardly he was thinking what a rich haul the train would be for the Chinese, if there was only some way they could get it. Then he asked the boasting colonel if there was any truth to the stories he'd read about Chinese irregulars filtering through the Jap lines as farmers and small merchants, turning suddenly on their "liberators" then melting into the nowhere after having wrecked everything Japanese on which they could lay their hands.

"Never have happen," Igaki grunted. "With country full of my soldiers how could happen?"

Charley decided the yarns were the inventions of foreign correspondents and let it pass unchallenged.

"When will we be in Chungfu?" he asked.

"'Bout fi' clock," the Jap replied. "Just come dark then. Chungfu las' city before fighting zone," he went on. "Few miles above Chungfu tracks cross into Chinese territory—" He broke off when he saw that the foreigner had rested his head on the seat back and closed his eyes.

A SUDDEN jolting brought Charleston Charley Prowell back to reality. The coach was empty, the train had stopped. They were at a small station and the inevitable beggars were already whining at the windows. Then he became aware of a dull rumble in the distance, and he knew without asking it was the pounding artillery in what Igaki had called a "peaceful penetration."

"Chungfu," someone said from the door. "Out, pliss."

Charley sighed, got up and started out. As he went down the steps he saw that the sun had gone, the air was sharp and night was descending. He also saw something else—here were more beggars at Chungfu than at any stop previous.

This he put down as being due to the fact that the city was an important railway junction. Proof came when he noticed that the engine had been detached and another was waiting on a siding. The new one would run them up to the Jap lines where the munitions would be unloaded.

However, the beggars interested him more than his surroundings. They were emaciated, bedraggled, their clothes hanging in rags and their pitiful thin voices setting up an eerie cacophony. One or two had trays on which were offered the inevitable water chestnuts, a few dried oranges and single cigarettes.

Jap soldiers bruited and pushed them about and they accepted it with a resignation that roused Charley's ire.

"Where's your red blood?" he asked himself. "What do you need to wake you up to fight these people?"

He was interrupted when a soldier grasped his arm and led him into the small barracks, crowded with Jap civilians and uniformed army officials. Mechanically he passed over his passport, sat down for the usual quarter hour of interrogation.

When he came out he knew his antique buying gag had left a lot to be desired in their minds. His papers were in order, true, and signed by Colonel Unzi, even so far as to contain the secret code insignia Unzi hid in his signature—but "antique buying?" Ah, yah, the foreigner was so honest and quick to answer—well, perhaps he was crazy. Lots of foreigners were.

Charley knew the excitement he caused, and he stood by enjoying the spectacle.

There was another spectacle that confronted him when he emerged. The coffin was being taken off the train on the shoul-

ders of a dozen beggars impressed for the duty. Once on the ground it was replaced on its wooden horses.

Then a poorly gowned Chinese followed down the steps from the private compartment. His attire was the cheap pukai of the lowest coolie, but his high forehead and snapping black eyes under a mass of white hair said he was anything but a low coolie.

JAP officials, soldiers and beggars alike stood courteously aside as he crossed the cleared space. He gave them all an impassive smile. Charley's heart seemed to catch in his throat.

The man was Woh, Ling-ping!

His presence gave proof to the rumor that he had been bartering with the Japs at Nanking. And Charley understood why Unzi had told him not to take that train —so old Woh could be rushed north in secrecy.

But what was worse, in Charley's estimation, he had added insult to injury for his people by boldly traveling on a train which carried death for scores of thousands of them.

"If only," the late bogus nobleman's mind ran, "I had a pistol, I think I could kill that traitorous rat now. He deserves it more than any man I've ever seen."

There was another aspect to the tableau. Since Woh, Ling-ping did not speak Japanese and Igaki did not speak Chinese, the conversation had to be in English.

Thus Charley had a front row seat to what was transpiring.

"Ver' sorry, but mus' have few question before you cross lines for clear up affairs before returning," the Jap said. "Ver' sorry for inconvenience."

"No inconvenience," old Woh beamed. "It's a pleasure."

He started for the door of the guardhouse. The others followed at a respectful distance. Charley stood rooted to the spot when he heard, "You have complete business at Nanking, no?"

"Ah, yes," came from the traitor. "Most satisfactorily. Most satisfactorily for the future of my country."

He glanced at Charley as he spoke. There was an odd hesitancy in his ebony eyes, a smoldering tenseness that was belied in the thin smile which hovered over his mouth. An intuitive sixth sense made the most famous confidence man on the China Coast join the throng to hear old Woh questioned.

But it was the same sixth sense that caused him to glance over his shoulder before entering the building. He saw the new engine being shunted into position, with two Jap workmen waiting to couple it to the long line of munition-bearing flat cars. And closer, he noticed something that made his pulse mount.

The majority of the beggars weren't interested in Woh any more. They were lounging indolently along the length of the train, their arms hidden in their long-gown sleeves and their yellow-brown faces curiously unconcerned. One of them had meandered on the heels of the Jap party and was lingering by the door of the guardhouse.

As the group disappeared there was a shouting from up ahead, then a clashing and creaking as the coupling was completed. Charley saw that clearly. A moment later he saw the driver grasp the ladder rungs to descend from the engine housing.

But what happened immediately after, Charley heard.

There was a cough from someone in the line of innocent appearing beggars, a casual, ordinary cough such as he had heard millions of times in his life.

Yet in this instance it galvanized the darkening platform into a maelstrom of activity. The mendicant by the guardhouse slammed the door shut, snapped the latch and whirled about from behind a spitting pistol. Simultaneously the others slithered their hands from the sleeves of their long gowns.

Some held pistols, others choppers. Even

the aged looking woman who had been loitering near the engine, changed suddenly to a bundle of sprung steel. She grabbed the descending engineer by the legs and when he reached the ground she was on top of him, a flashing streak of silver blade in her hand and venom in her voice.

The engineer never arose. So quick was the onslaught behind his back that Charley thought he never knew what had happened.

THE same story was repeated for the length of the train. A score or more Jap soldiers who had been sitting on guard duty aboard the various flats were pulled from their perches before their voices could cry out. Some saw their assailants, others knew only that death reached out for them over the bulging mounds of canvas-covered boxes at their backs.

The whole thing went off with a precision of long rehearsal. Meanwhile the

Japs inside the house were thundering to be released.

Charley saw what followed in a flashing panorama of action. For on the first split second of the attack he had made a flying dive for the shelter of the coffin. Once under its heavy teak protection he glanced out between the legs of the horses supporting it and praised the crazy whim that had made him take the train he shouldn't have taken—the one on which he'd been deploring that he'd found no excitement.

Abruptly there was a snort of steam from the engine head. Then a grinding of wheels, a terrific jolting as the couplings strained and held. Slowly the whole mass began to move. Inch by inch it gathered momentum and when the guardhouse door gave with a rending of wood, the train was well under way.

Few of the Jap soldiers who rushed out, knelt and aimed their rifles, ever fired them. They were met by a hail of lead from the erstwhile beggars who were strung the length of the flat cars, finding shelter behind the piles of munitions that had been destined to kill their fellow countrymen.

Charley wanted to scream out congratulations. But by the time his wildly beating heart had returned to normal the train was a diminishing brown streak in the distance. He could picture that resolute crew of kidnapers running her at full steam when they reached the lines. And he knew that by that time she would be moving too fast to be stopped. Straight through the Jap lines they'd plunge her, not slowing until she was a dozen miles inside Chinese territory.

Then a hasty unloading. The machine-gun bullets would replenish Chinese guns over a hundred miles of front, and the ten tons of rice would answer the victualling problem for many a day. Trust those smart Chinese who had pulled it off to make best use of their prize.

But meanwhile there was a greater problem closer at hand.

It became apparent when he heard the voice of Woh, Ling-ping behind him.

"What has happened? What has happened? They must have discovered my plans. This is a terrible blow."

Charley emerged from his shelter then, his fingers crossed on Woh, Ling-ping. He began to suspect that perhaps he'd been hasty in his desire to kill the great Woh for a traitor. But he said nothing. He had no chance to.

Igaki made a hasty examination of the dead Japs who littered the platform. Then he rushed up to Woh.

"You deserve be kill for this," he snarled.

Woh's face whitened. His lips compressed and his eyes were wide with fright.

"Kill me? After I have sold my birth-

right to a foreign domination that can only be to my country's ultimate good."

IGAKI was in a quandary. He shuffled his feet and tugged at the lobe of an ear. "Jus' same, this does not look right." he said hesitantly.

Charley's mind went back to the scene where the beggar woman farther down the line had been whining supplications at the open window of the private compartment.

"Can it be," he asked himself, "that we've all been taken in by this lad? I hate to admit it even to myself, but I'm not so sure this lad isn't a great actor."

However, if he was to carry out his own deal with the Japs it was necessary that he hang on Woh's heels until that moment when the near diety should arrive in Nanking in a coffin. So he crawled out from his shelter when he heard Igaki, "You sure you no give signal—?"

"There was no signal," Charley interrupted. "This man was inside the guardhouse when the assault came. I saw it all."

Woh seemed grateful for the break. He looked at Charley and bowed. "Thank you for helping an innocent man."

"I'd do as much for anybody," Charley put in.

But he did not tell the sharp eyed Chinese the reasons that had motivated him.

"Mus' have safety in future," Igaki said. "So I think best way to do this——" He broke off and a thin smile hovered at the corners of his tight cut of a mouth.

Old Woh caught the inference. "You will pardon my conceit," he said, "but if you should kill me it would be known the length and breadth of China within a sunrise. You might also have to answer to your chief in Nanking."

Igaki backed down. He ran a hand along the side of his chin and his brow furrowed. "Then mebbe I imprison you until we investigate this."

"Ah," Woh shot back, still smiling, still master of the situation. "In that case I might climb in my coffin."

The Jap seemed to recoil. "You ver' smart, eh? You have things own way, eh?"

Charley didn't listen to the rest. He was interested in those four words Woh had said, the four words that made no sense to him but obviously carried great weight with the Jap—"climb in my coffin."

And there the coffin was, at Woh's elbow. To Charley, its presence tied in in some way with Unzi's cryptic remark when he had asked where he could buy a coffin in devastated interior China.

"Meet Woh an' you onner'stan'," Unzi had said.

Well, Charley had met him and under strange circumstances, but he couldn't yet understand why the great ex-governor general should carry an ornate coffin with him.

"An' this American," Igaki's strident voice cut into his thoughts, "I think we keep you two together for time. I not yet satisfied about stealing of train. I investigate, pliss?"

HIS eyes, as he said it, were suddenly narrowed and Charley decided there was a lot more going on in his avid brain than he was allowing to show in his poker face.

Well, Charley could give a guess what some of it might be. It would be very much a feather in the cap of Colonel Igaki if he could prove Colonel Unzi at Nanking to have been taken in by a clever pair of crooks, the great Woh, Ling-ping and an alleged "antique buyer." The Tokyo war office wouldn't forget that in a hurry. And with the numerous spy bureaus warring internally against each other, it was not out of the realm of possibility that Colonel Igaki might become General Igaki, supreme commander and coordinator of the Mikado's espionage forces.

"But I'll keep mum," he summed it up. "I'll play safe and say nothing. Sometimes you get farther by watching and waiting."

For a week Charley and Woh, Ling-ping were quartered together in a guard-

house, the coffin in an anteroom, but he got nowhere.

"Why do you insist on having that around" Charley asked him once.

Woh's bland smile was as innocent in the glimmer in his enigmatic eyes. "Who knows I am an old man, and everyone's days are numbered——"

But the Chinese' robust constitution belied any thought that his days were numbered. He was in excellent health and his spirits were high. Then Charley thought of working on Igaki, opening up and telling him the whole story in an effort to learn something, but Igaki was not to be found.

"In conference," the sentry said. "Him have long talks to reach plan."

"Plan for what?" Charley sought with a disarming innocence.

"You soon know," the guard boasted. "Word have come from Nanking how can solve this."

Charley wondered if the solution was a mufti dressed Jap who appeared abruptly with a camera and a wide grin.

"For my album you let me take picture, no?" he asked.

WOH didn't object. Neither did Charley, though he was aware that he was never taken alone. Woh was always with him, on the Jap's suggestion. Charley was about to put him down as a candid camera bug, until he made the discovery that the man had been the porter on the train. Further, he took pictures like a rank amateur, fumbling with the adjustments, taking a dozen snaps for each pose, where an expert would have taken one.

"You notice he speaks English, now," Woh commented. "He claimed he could not, on the train. From my compartment I heard your discussion with him. And you will notice that for a servant he is big, well muscled and upright in his carriage. I would say he had been a wrestler in civilian life."

Charley noticed something else that evening. A new crop of wandering beggars had appeared and as they passed the house where Charley and Woh were quartered, the Chinese called out to them in Shantung dialect. Instantly the guards drove them away, but not before they had answered him with much arm waving and fist pounding. What they'd talked about Charley didn't know, though he could guess from Woh's thoughtful absorption when Charley confronted him.

"Look here," he said, "I'm beginning to wake up to something. I thought you were a traitor for selling out to the Japs, but now if you're planning another train snatch don't be afraid of me. You're the bravest man I ever met, coming into Jap territory and putting it over on them as you did."

Woh bowed, but his smile had little mirth behind it. "Thank you. I am planning nothing, yet. And it is only your *assumption* that I was responsible for the affair the other day."

"Oh, I understand that," Charley replied with a mock seriousness. "You didn't plan it so far as anybody can prove. But down the line I saw the window of your coach open and a beggar woman standing there. Putting two and two together——"

"You are very astute, my friend," the Chinese put in. "You see everything. You miss nothing."

"I've missed just one thing," Charley cut him off. "I can understand that the Japs don't dare kill you, you're too well known and revered by the masses. But I don't savvy why you carry your coffin around."

"It is the privilege of the aged. All Chinese elders do it. I like to feel that I am ready to die when my moment comes and that my resting place is prepared, that I give no one the expense of buying a coffin for me."

Charley began to get it then. It was a Chinese custom he'd never come upon; but that was China, vast and unknown to Occidentals though planes flew over its innermost recesses and foreign papers were always writing of its strange customs that

had come down since time immemorial. And he could understand Woh, Ling-ping's acceptance of the gesture—he was a student of the ancient classics.

"What is this about 'climb in my coffin'?" Charley persisted.

"Ah," Woh said, a smile breaking over his face. "We Orientals have a belief that if one dies through the fault of another, or if he is forced to take his own life because of another, the penalty for his death is on the instigator's family honor. Thus I told Igaki that if he imprisoned me I would 'climb in my coffin.' He understood and the men under him understood."

Charley's heart had warmed to the wily Chinese as the explanation continued. And he knew now the mystery of who had planned the train snatch. The picture he presented had a lot in it that appealed to the spring trap mind of the smoothest working criminal brain west of Frisco. "You're one man in a million because of your position," he enthused. "You can do anything you want with that threat—if you don't do it my way I'll pop off."

"I haven't done so badly, so far," Woh admitted enigmatically. "To a foreigner it might be petulant perhaps, like a child—"

"Nothing childlike about you, General," the bogus nobleman, ex-confidence man rushed on without thinking. "I could use a partner in my business. If I had a man with your power—!"

Charley broke off to tip-toe across the room and close the shutters. But first he looked out onto the deserted yard. Far across in the gloom he saw the outline of a sentry walking post and beyond him he caught the eerie silhouette of a train about to leave for Nanking. The hissing steam from the roundhouse on his right told that the engine had not yet been coupled.

When he returned to Woh he saw that the Chinese' smile had faded, that his eyes were ebony pools of questioning appraisal. "But I am not in the business of killing old men for a reward," he snapped contemptuously. "I know of your agreement with the Japs—fifty thousand dollars for my life. The beggars brought me warning of it from Jap headquarters where we have agents in disguise. So I understand why you stepped in at the station, and why you have curried my favor here. What is more, I know of your nefarious career as a swindler and thief."

Charley let him finish. Outwardly he was the calmest man present but inwardly his brain was doing handsprings. "Listen," he begged earnestly when Woh had droned to a close. "That's how it was at the start. But since seeing that train snatch and knowing you here I've changed my opinion. And you have it wrong—I never killed a man in my life. A specific part of my agreement with the Japs was that I would not kill you. I'm merely to see that you arrive in Nanking in a coffin. I never savvied that at the start, and I don't completely now, but when they gave me the money before I'd even left the Yangtze, when I put it in my account in a Shanghai bank before doing a thing—! Don't you think I'd be a fool if I hadn't accepted?"

"But a man with your background of lies and tricks—"

Charley spoke then as he'd never spoken in his life. He'd heard of Chinese warlords running out on their people for Jap gold, he'd known many of them. But when he found one who was on the level, when he wanted to help him and had his offer refused—! "I'd have you know," he said with some heat, "that I'm a man of my

word. I promised I wouldn't kill you, and I won't. To prove it—why, to prove it I'll escape from this place now. You'll never see me again after tonight."

"The money you've been paid?" Woh asked.

"Blast that," Charley said. "I'll turn it back to them. That may be hard for anyone who knows me to believe, but fifty thou is peanuts to what I've drawn on some of my jobs."

"You mean you'll actually give the money back, for me?"

"More than for you, for China," Charley put in. "People who take what your people are taking from the rest of the world deserve a break. You can't buy American munitions because you haven't a navy to convoy what you pay cash for as the Japs can, but the bombs that have been falling on Chinese undefended cities are American made. Yet you go on uncomplaining, fighting an uneven war that grows more hopeless every day. You've got more courage than any nation I've ever known. And that's why I'll show you one man is your friend in his heart, despite the wordy platitudes that may spew from the mouths of others. Call me anything you want but I'll show you I'm on the level. I'm checking out now. I can make it. So long—"

"Not so fast. Not so fast," a voice interrupted from the porch.

CHARLEY whirled and saw the ex-porter stepping over the door sill. His beady eyes were gimlet hard and his hulking shoulders filled the opening. Snaggle teeth were bared in a grin as he carefully closed the door behind him, made sure it was securely fastened. Then he drew a pistol from a silk cloth wrapping, waved it menacingly between the two men in front of him, and sat down.

Woh took a step back and his face went ashen. "What is the meaning of this—?"

The Jap shook a deprecating hand. "I've been sent up here to get you, Woh. This smart foreigner fall for trick like fool all foreigners are. He see me on train, but him never know part I play. Him think me stupid porter. Bah, me high up in secret service—"

Charley saw it all then in a streaking flash of comprehension. The porter would kill Woh, as the Japs had planned all along to kill him. But the blame would fall on his fellow prisoner. With his past, Charley knew he'd have a hard time squirming out of the case that would be built up against him. Then what would prevent the Japs from executing him after a mock trial and in so doing end the matter once and for all. They'd done such things before, they were not above doing them again.

"Damn you," Charley growled, "you're using the reputation of the smartest lad on the China Coast to cover up a dirty killing of a hero. It's the kind of tactics——"

He never finished, for of a sudden the porter's leering smile turned to a hate-filled glare of menacing death. In that split second came a turn of events Charley had not counted on.

He saw the cotton clad feet of Woh Ling-ping leap across the room in a single bound. The Chinese' body pressed against the porter while his wiry arms encircled the hulking frame, clasped in the back and held. The pistol, caught in the region of Woh's middle, was useless.

Charley knew it wouldn't remain useless, for the two of them were no match for their bulging adversary. Woh didn't weigh a hundred pounds and he was an old man; Charleston Charley Prowell though a six footer was softened by easy living in the best hotels the Far East could boast. Not knowing what else to do, he began ineffectually to choke the porter with his hands.

But the Jap was not to be caught unawares. With a crashing snap-back of his closely cropped head he smashed Charley in the nose and at the same time burst from Woh's encompassing grasp. But the pistol had become snagged in the Chinese' long gown and clattered to the floor.

Woh was on it with the grace and speed of a cat. The Jap kicked him viciously with a growling oath, but old Woh had the answer to the cry of pain that burst from his lips. For a second time his wiry arms pinioned Woh, below the knees now, and with an instinctive lunge forward, Charley sent the Jap spinning.

"Hold him," Charley cried. "Hold him. I'll get the pistol."

"You'll awaken everyone," Woh's voice came. "Get a rope, we'll tie him."

THERE was no rope in the small house, Charley knew. But on the table at his elbow he saw something just as good. It was the square of silk in which the pistol had been wrapped. And Charley knew how to use it—he'd learned from the Chinese underworld.

Grasping it by two corners and twirling, he had it drawn out a good three feet in length.

Then he shot it over the Jap's head, looped the ends and drew it taut.

With a scream of defiance, the porter struggled to his knees. What followed after that Charley could never recall. He remembered joining in the scrambling, rolling fight that upset chairs and tables. He remembered being on top one moment and on the bottom the next. And somewhere in the melee someone pulled again on the strangling length of silk, for abruptly the Jap's lobster red face contorted to a grimace of resignation. The breath went out of him in a slow gasp and his arms grew limp.

Meanwhile Charley's nose flowed crimson. He got to his feet, hauled Woh erect.

"We've killed him," he gasped. "We've gone too far."

"Nonsense," came from the ex-general. "Leave this to me. But you're done if you're found here. Get that train, pull out while you can. It should be easy to slip across the yard and catch it on the fly a mile or so south."

"What about you?" Charley gasped. "What about the body?"

"They won't dare touch me. And I'll dispose of the body. You save yourself, friend of China, my miserable life is of small consequence."

Charley took it as the hand of fate that a loud hissing came from outside at that moment. Under Woh's insistence he doused the light, slipped from the house and lost himself in the fog shrouded gloom of the yard. It was a strange ending to what had looked like a mission promising easy money—and there was the blot on his conscience that he'd killed the first man in his career.

But as he started on the run he was interrupted by the shouting voice of the guard. Simultaneously he saw the lights go on in the house, and with them came a rifle shot. Then another and another. Voices and screams rent the air as he plunged on.

"Dammit," he flayed himself. "That's the end of wily old Woh, Ling-ping. And I'm running out on him like a scared rabbit."

Yet going back, he knew, was death.

AROUND noon the following day a Red Cross special from the fighting zone north blew loudly for the turn above Pukow, across the river from Nanking. Charleston Charley Prowell was aware that his moment had come, the moment he'd dreaded since he crawled under the tie-rods of a coach the night before. Weary, cramped and half frozen throughout the long vigil, his face grimy and his clothes torn beyond repair, he dropped off as the train slowed, hit on a roll and congratulated himself that there was a special guardian who watched over drunks and crooks.

Once the train had disappeared it was no trouble for him to spring erect. Then he saw a farmer tilling a field nearby. Within a half hour he was garbed in a tattered long-gown like any other of the

thousands of beggars roaming the interior, and two hours after that he was rubbing his face with mud from a stream, hiding his hair under the foreign-style felt hat the farmer had given him.

Then he continued, toward Pukow, with the spires of Nanking in the distance.

But closer to hand, he saw with a start, was the upthrust rigging of a trio of Occidental warships anchored in the river. That gave him heart, and he labored on.

With typical Japanese conceit in their own supremacy, there were no guards around the city. Thus he had no difficulty in entering. The many Chinese he passed were too intent on their own misfortunes to pay any attention to him, such Jap soldiers who roamed the streets had eyes only for the opposite sex.

Then he saw something as startling as anything he'd ever found in a nation famed for the fantastic—a foreign language newspaper. A pile of them were on a stand outside a tobacconists and as he bent over he saw a five-column picture of himself under a glaring black headline. It was one of the snaps the porter had taken, but the headline made Charley's blood run cold.

"Woh, Ling-ping Murdered By Foreigner," it read.

Beside it was another headline story—that a group of American, French and British officials were in the city in an effort to arrange a truce between the warring factions. They had come up from Shanghai on the three ships moored off the foreshore.

"'Ere, wot the' bloody 'ell is this?" he heard over his shoulder.

INCHING sideways, Charley saw a group of British tars behind him with full equipment. "Them damn Japs musta' printed 'at las' night," another said. "Kinda prematooer, they are, sayin' we're leavin' at tiffin." They're bloody pleased wi' 'emselves, they are. Why this paper wuz printed jus' for th' lads we brought up. Propaganda, it is, sayin' a foreigner killed this toff—tryin' to throw a monkey wrench in th' proceedings fer peace—"

There was a strained silence as the man broke off.

Charley could guess why. It was his cue.

"I'm the foreigner," he whispered. "That story's bunk from top to bottom. Get me aboard your ship and you'll have champagne for a month."

The sailors needed but a moment to convince themselves that the bedraggled native at their elbows was a foreigner. And an English speaking foreigner was their meat.

"We'll get you aboard, lad," a petty officer said. "Don' you bloody well fear we won'."

Meanwhile a group of Americans appeared. The P. O. called them over. There was a whispered conference and the Yanks joined the party. Hardly had they started than they came on a detail of Frenchmen. Another gab-fest followed and the Frenchies added their strength. By the time the group reached the station they were two hundred strong—and it was noticeable to Charley that the Jap soldiers they met en route gave them a wide berth.

But at the station they stopped. A train was puffing in from the north and oddly enough the high diplomats of the party were assembled there.

"Welcomin' a bloody coffin o' some dead toff," one of the P. O.'s put in. "The admiral's secretary jus' told' me. It's a kinda crazy custom these slant-eyes got. The dead lad musta' been a big gun, wot?"

"Yeah," a Yank interrupted. "Say, I'd like to see this show. I'll take a picture."

Charley had no objection, especially when a Jap rank broke to let the armed foreigners crowd up to a vantage point. He could give a good guess whose coffin it would be. And a better guess who would be in it.

"It serves me right that I have to watch it," his mind ran. "If I hadn't been yellow, old Woh would be alive today."

But Charley was premature, as well as the Japs. He saw the train grind to a speaking halt. Then the door of a coach opened and a heavy teak coffin came into view. A squad of Jap marines went forward and lifted it to the platform. The foreign diplomats removed their hats. The armed forces stood at the salute. A Jap general placed his hat over his heart, and behind him Charley saw Colonel Ito Unzi shedding crocodile tears.

Then a surprising thing happened. Slowly the heavy lid of the coffin rose, toppled over and crashed to the ground.

Woh, Ling-ping sat erect, beamed on everyone and climbed out.

There were muttered exclamations. Someone had the bad manners to laugh. The laugh was infectious and soon the entire foreign delegation broke into roars when the word was passed around.

Charley's heart leaped into his throat. It seemed about to leap from his body when Woh spotted him, crossed to him. Trust that sharp-eyed Chinese not to be taken in by a muddy face or a tattered long gown.

"Ah," he said at Charley's side, "we meet again." Then his face broke into an enigmatic smile. "Have I complied with your agreement? Am I arriving in Nanking in a coffin?"

"To the letter," Charley spoke up when he could find his tongue.

"And you have no qualms now about accepting the money?"

"None whatever. In fact I'll split it with you for the Chinese Red Cross."

"That is fine."

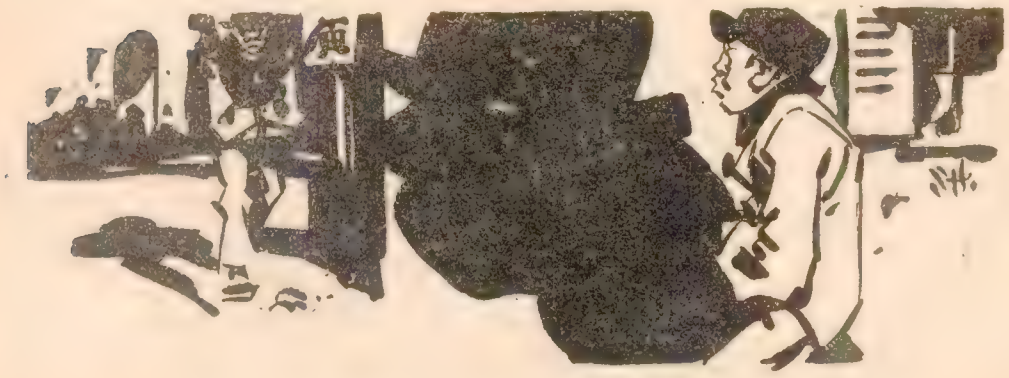
"But what happened to the porter?" Charley could not restrain himself from asking.

"It was simple. I put him under the floorboards. They won't find him for a month, if then. After that I said I wanted to come to Nanking, and Igaki knew better than to stop me. As you said, 'There's something in the position I occupy.'"

"I say," Charley ventured. "I'm going down to Shanghai on a British ship. Why don't you come along?"

Old Woh glanced around at the muttering Japs. Then he looked at the foreign force and caught something in their smiling faces. "It might be a good idea for my health," he said. "I accept. You and I have done fairly well so far, we might consider that partnership you mentioned—"

The Japs stood respectfully aside as they started for the docks.



INCA INTERLUDE

By EATON K. GOLDTHWAITE

Author of "St. Peter's Pup," "Resurrection River," etc.

WILLIAM KELLY adjusted a battered sunhelmet and stared from wide, unsmiling blue eyes. Lean and sun-blackened, his face was an unfathomable mask from prominent nose to close-set ears. His tall body, wide and thin like the paint-peeled door from which he had just emerged, was muscled and wary. His faded, patched shirt was open at the neck and only the throbbing pulse at the base of his throat belied the excitement that was in him.

For, as William Kelly stood and surveyed the mud walls and steaming galvanized awnings of Iquitos' principal thoroughfare, he was possessed of news. Vital, exciting, almost unbelievable news. It had come to him as elusively as the whisper of the Marañon's waters swirling about the pilings of the *cauchouc*-laden docks. Only a word, murmured by José,

William Kelly Knew the Country and the Professor Knew the Lingo

proprietor of *El Rio Cafe—"Knowles!"*

Knowles, in Iquitos! The famed archæologist who had dedicated his life to discovery of the secrets of the Incas! The man whose books were standard formulae folowed by the never-ending wave of explorers, scientists and adventurers piercing the Andes from Quito to Titicaca. That he was in Iquitos could mean but one thing—the Great Discoverer had given up trying to penetrate the Llanganatis from the west and was now going to attempt the *Oriente.*

William Kelly whistled as he trudged along. Before his resolute person reluctantly parted the loitering groups of Equatorial mid-afternoon; greasy half-caste *caucheros,* haughty high-cheeked *mestizos,* listless Peruvian clerks, stolid straight-haired *Indios;* around and with him moved the conglomerate smells of commerce, the stench of the crawling river, the hot breath of the close-crowding jungle. Kelly's whistle became a jaunty melody as he directed a broad wink at a giggling, big-bosomed and black vendor of herbs and mounted the worn stone steps of the Palace Hotel.

"Professor Knowles," William Kelly cheerfully announced to the Peruvian who was vacantly stirring the stuffy air of the lobby desk with a palm-leaf fan. "Tell him Mister Kelly is here."

Sleepily, the Peruvian yawned. "The professor is engaged," he mumbled, fixing condescending eyes on Kelly's disreputable attire. "A gentleman. Will the *Senhor* wait?"

The *Senhor* would wait. Stiffly he occupied a chair, sitting on its edge and eyeing the stairs. A strange man, William Kelly. Locked up in his brain was a veritable encyclopedia of jungle lore. He knew the tricks and wiles of the river. He knew the habits and peculiarities of the residents of the interior, both the animals and their less-civilized cousins, the *Jivaros.* He could converse in Quichua, Jivaro and Inca dialects, in Spanish, Portuguese and the universal *talkee-talkee.* Yet he had been born in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. He was Brooklynese and Irish from the top of his flaming crown to the soles of his enormous feet, yet all glowing and well-meant offers from jungle-made friends to return him to gainful Metropolitan employment had met with flat, unexplained refusals. Kelly was an enigma, a topic of conversation from Paramaribo to Para, and from Manaos to Barranca. Some said it was a woman; some had it that he killed a man.

BIG feet showed at the top of the stairs, followed by bowed legs and a great, chunky torso. A long-armed man, clad in cloppy ducks. His smooth-shaven face was as dark as Kelly's own, but his black eyes were crafty and evasive. A grin parted his thick lips and a laugh rumbled from his deep chest as he spied William Kelly.

"Well, ain't this a surprise," the stocky man chortled as he came forward with outstretched hand. "You're the last guy I'd ever expect to see in a hotel."

Kelly arose stiffly. Ignoring the sneer in the other's voice he accepted the hand. "Hello, Griswold," he said briefly.

Griswold balanced on his heels, and hooked broad thumbs into his capacious belt. "Not plannin' on a little trip, are you Kelly?" he asked, sucking his teeth. "Because if you are, you're too late. We got a full crew."

A flush extended to Kelly's flaming hair and died quickly. "That so?" he questioned slowly.

"Yep. The perfessor needed a good man that knows his way around, and my references just filled the bill. We're startin' tomorrow," Griswold smiled, and his wolf-like teeth clicked unpleasantly.

Kelly shrugged. "I don't suppose your references included Doctor Clauss, the man you left for dead up the Masuni," he remarked in a calm voice.

Griswold's smile vanished. His tongue

circled his lips and angry glints started in his eyes. "Listen, Kelly," he said in a low voice "if you're lookin' for trouble, you found the right guy. One word to the perfessor about that, and—" He inhaled noisily.

"And what?" Kelly challenged.

Griswold sneered. "Listen, Kelly. You may be a god to some of the dumb Jivaros, but you haven't got me scared. Just you talk out of turn and I'll take you apart." His beady eyes shifted. "That Clauss business. You heard one side. There's another side to it, too."

Kelly grinned. "Maybe. I have my own ideas. Talkin' isn't in my line, especially about somebody else. But any time you feel strong, you know where to find me."

Griswold scowled, and muttering unintelligible threats, went out the door.

"COME in!" a cheery voice invited in answer to Kelly's knock, and sun-helmet in hand, the Irishman carefully closed the door behind him.

Seated at a map-covered deal table before the window he saw the sun-bathed outline of a man. Kelly looked and his consternation grew as he beheld a lithe, smiling boyish individual. Not at all the scholarly old gentleman Kelly had expected to see, and he looked around for another.

"Well, I'm Professor Knowles," the youth drawled in amusement, and laying aside his pencil extended a slim brown hand. "Not disappointed, are you?" he laughed.

Kelly swallowed hard. "I've heard so much about you, I guess I——" He paused in confusion, and finally blurted out, "I'm William Kelly."

The professor's smile was friendly and disarming. "Glad to know you," he said warmly. "Doctor Williston mentioned you in his last letter." He waved to a bottle of Scotch and glasses on the bureau. "Care for a spot?"

Kelly helped himself. Drink in hand he perched on the edge of a straight-backed chair. "Professor," he began with characteristic directness, "I have a good idea of why you're in Iquitos. I think I can help you."

Knowles smiled. "Call me Harry," he invited. "The title is merely to impress people. So you know why I'm here?" and he inquisitively eyed the well-knit visitor.

Kelly hunched his shoulders and pursed his lips shrewdly. "Yep. You're goin' to try the Llanganatis from the *Oriente.*"

Knowles stood up. He walked to the window and looked out at the mud walls and thatched roofs of the Indian quarter. Slowly he clasped his hands behind his back and nodded. "For more than four centuries," he said slowly "men have tried to tear aside the veil surrounding the secrets of the Incas. Shortly after the conquest of the sun-worshippers by the Spaniards an old soldier, Valverde by name, was led to the incomparably rich Inca mines by his native wife. Records show that he made the journey several times and later died in Spain, a rich man. Like all true Spaniards he was loyal to his sovereign and bequeathed him a map on his death.

"The Crown dispatched two unsuccessful expeditions, and finally Valverde's document became quasi-public property in the Spanish archives. In the centuries that have elapsed the slopes of the Andes have become white with the bones of the attempters."

The young professor turned. His face was lined and his eyes held inexpressible depths. "I shall not fail," he said in a quiet, positive voice. "Another page of Inca history lies in the Llanganatis. It shall be found."

Kelly nodded morosely. "You hired Griswold?" he asked.

Knowles glowed with enthusiasm. "An excellent man, highly recommended. I am fortunate." He paused and looked ques-

tioningly at Kelly. "You weren't thinking of applying for the job?"

"I was," Kelly returned tersely. "It's been a dream of mine for years to go on beyond the Pongo. I thought maybe this would be it."

Knowles shook his head. "Sorry, Kelly. I really am genuinely sorry that you're too late. My funds are limited, and we're limited as to the number of men. I can't afford to take you."

Kelly shrugged. "You got to have paddlers," he said simply.

LONZO GRISWOLD was not greatly surprised or particularly pleased to learn that William Kelly had been engaged to go along.

"He's goin' as a ordinary paddler," sniggered Pete Monks, a derelict *cauchero* tolerated by Griswold because of his flattering attentions. Pete was drinking Griswold's liquor at the *El Rio* and was outdoing himself in attempts to please the stocky windfall. "Kin you imagine him, the great Kelly, paddlin' for you! I bet you'll make him sweat."

"A paddler, hunh!" Griswold snarled as he wiped his puffy lips with the back of an unclean hand. "I'll give him all the paddlin' he wants. Tryin' to get my job. Tryin' to show me up." His face was contorted with rage as he swaggered back and forth before the bar, glaring at Pete and the silent José. "I've got a good mind to smash his jaw for him right now."

Behind the bar José studiously polished a glass. "Meester Kelly bad man to smash, I theenk," he said softly.

Griswold whirled. "Yeah?" he grunted. "Well, I've smashed some bad ones in my time, you spig cockroach, if you want to make anything of it."

The towel in José's left hand moved fractionally to reveal a small, businesslike automatic where the glass had been. "José do not like man to talk like thees," he purred through smiling lips. "Kelly my friend. Call names, eet ees bad. Better you go now, but pay for drinks first. Yes?"

The bluster died from Lonzo Griswold's face. Growling, he fished in his pockets, slammed a silver *sole* on the mahogany and abruptly departed.

William Kelly was not a coward, and fortunately for his own preservation and safety, not a fool either. He accepted José's news of Griswold's threat philosophically and even saw fit to chuckle over the affair.

"Lonzo'd like to have me get full o' your rum," Kelly grinned. "He'd like nothin' better than to have me huntin' him tonight so he could holler "cops!" If I was to be in jail tomorrow morning when Knowles is ready to start, it'd suit Lonzo fine."

José stared with admiration-filled eyes. "But of course," he breathed. "To me, such a plan would not occur."

"That's because you're a man, not a snake," Kelly said warmly. "I can't figure yet how Griswold pulled the wool over Knowles' eyes."

"Pulled the wool?" José looked puzzled. "That I do not understand, *Senhor*."

Kelly chuckled. "Don't worry about it. Just see that I'm up at five. I have to make the launch that's takin' us to Borja."

THE room was completely dark. It may have been the flash of a knife, or perhaps Kelly's jungle-sharpened senses that had warned him of the presence of a man or men flattened out against the wall near the door. He turned his head slightly on the pillow and made no warning change in the regularity of his breathing. Stealthily his hand crept down to the spot where his loaded revolver should rest at his side. Groping, he remembered with an inward curse that after oiling and cleaning he had left it on the bureau.

Groaning in feigned sleep he kicked at the thin blanket until his lean, muscular body lay unhampered and ready. The stealthy shadows, halted by the movement,

came on again as his regular breathing was resumed.

Lying in taut readiness, Kelly felt the warmth of their approach. His nose told him that the men were Indians and his ears counted two. When they were poised, so near that hot breath fanned his face, the big-fisted man swung into immediate and devastating action.

Crash! Kelly's right fist shot up and connected with a surprised assailant's jaw, backing him into a chair. Thud! Both feet landed in the pit of a knife-bearer's stomach. Then, fighting and clawing like an enraged beast, the lean man's onslaught carried him to the bureau.

"All right, now!" Kelly's voice cut the darkness like the twang of a *machete*. "I'll shoot the first——"

His words ended at the smack of a hastily-thrown knife as it imbedded itself in the door jamb, and with cool precision Kelly pulled the trigger.

A howl of pain followed the reverberating roar of the gun's discharge. Swiftly on its heels Kelly pressed the button of the electric lantern on the bureau and leaped aside. The glare revealed the remaining knife-thrower, weapon in hand. At sight of the ready revolver the Indian trembled with fear and the knife sank harmlessly.

Kelly strode forward. Grasping the wounded marauder by the shirt he pulled him to his feet and propelled him to the door with a kick. The other one needed no assistance or invitation and scrambled with abject haste across the floor.

"Now, you sneakin' jungle monkeys," Kelly roared, "go back to Griswold or whoever hired you and tell 'em that William Kelly is leavin' tomorrow mornin' for Borja. And tell 'em he's mad!"

IT WAS not without reason that William Kelly was known as the most desirable companion and in the same tenor the most dangerous adversary of the upper Amazon. Under the Irishman's gruff, good-humored exterior was a layer of steel from which sparks occasionally flashed. And sparks were very near the surface now. Knowles' chartered launch was spacious, but not spacious enough.

Kelly had been keeping his own counsel about the attack of the previous night, lounging forward, conversing in low tones with Masi, headman of the Indian paddlers. His tall body was slumped against the deckhouse, his keen eyes sweeping the river as he talked. Suddenly, from above, a faint scraping sound came to his ear and through instinct he leaped to one side, pushing Masi in the opposite direction as he did so.

"Look out below!" came a belated, warning bellow in Griswold's voice, and a heavy tool-filled case came crashing to the deck where Kelly and Masi had been the moment before.

Griswold's face, pale and agitated, peered over the edge. "You fellows all right?" the stocky boss asked uncertainly, his eyes shifting as rapidly as the tongue which licked his thick lips.

Kelly picked himself up. "Yeah," he said laconically. "Sorry?"

Griswold's mien was sulky as he came down the ladder to inspect the damage. "You," he roared at Mitasuni, an inoffensive paddler attracted by the commotion, "what's the idea, piling them cases up like that? These fellers mighta been killed!"

Mitasuni stared blankly. Griswold himself had ordered the cases piled that way. And even Professor Knowles had passed on the order. The professor——

But Knowles was serenely aloof and unaware of the brewing trouble. Surrounded by his hopes and dreams, the dapper archaeologist was buried in a world of crumbling ruins and musty volumes. His eyes were strained to the west, dreaming over the Andes *cordilleras* that loomed ahead.

Privately, when the commotion had subsided, William Kelly sought Griswold out and fixed him with an unwavering gaze.

"That's twice, now," Kelly said coolly.

"You better make the next one a good job."

Griswold stayed the roar in his throat as he glanced swiftly around and saw that he had no audience. A sneer turned the corners of his mouth. "Don't worry," he promised. "You'll get it when I'm ready to give it to you. What's the matter, afraid to fight?"

White heat boiled within Kelly, but he restrained himself. He knew that Griswold's game was to goad his temper until mutiny was the outcome. Under the code of the jungle, Griswold as expedition boss was the law. Shrugging, he turned away and showed his self control by not so much as clenching his fists as he ambled blithely along the deck.

AT Borja, in the deep still water beyond great limestone boulders, the launch discharged its passengers and unloaded its freight. Here, directly ahead and due west, rose the walls of a box-like canyon. Blanketed on all sides by the stretching, interminable green of the forest, this was the portal to the *Oriente*. The Pongo Menseriche, for such it was called, served as the bottle neck for the confluence of clear, cold rivers rushing down from the melting snows and rains of the Andes peaks. Here the air was cooler and mercifully free of insects.

On the smooth sand beyond the boulders, Griswold supervised the sorting of the stores, keeping an eye to it that William Kelly's broad back was weighted down with the heaviest work.

"You, Kelly!" Griswold shouted despite the other's nearness. "Give a hand to this box of stuff. You, Masi! Build a shack on the high ground. You, Mitasuni! Start a fire!"

Knowles, his face pale and eyes shining brightly, walked about lost in dreams. "Jorja!" he breathed. "Seventy-five years ago, when the Peruvian Government sought to establish disputed boundaries, a colony was planted here. People, flesh-and-blood white citizens built houses, planted farms. Then one day a supply boat arrived from Barranca and found—nothing. The houses were a ruin, the crops destroyed, the people vanished. Borja, the Jamestown of South America!"

Kelly carefully rested a load on a sloping rock. "There's lime trees, wild, still growin' in there," he offered.

Griswold bustled over. "Come on, Kelly," he snarled. "Quit stallin'! We got work enough for an army!"

Kelly's eyes smouldered. Unprotesting, he returned the case to his shoulders. Deep in his heart he hoped that Knowles had heard him, and in hearing had realized that Kelly knew this country. For Griswold did not. Griswold's experience stopped at Barranca. He was unprepared for what lay ahead, and unless the strict science of experience was followed, the Knowles expedition would come to a complete and disastrous end in the middle of the Pongo.

"Okay, you!" Lonzo Griswold blustered as he squatted in the stern of the rear canoe. "This Pongo is tough, and you got to paddle. Kelly, your boat is first through. Masi, take it next. We'll follow."

FIRST through? Kelly grinned. That would be Griswold's way. Watch to see how the others did it, and then sail through safely. Well, in the next few hours Griswold would learn something. And unfortunately for him, Knowles might, too, for he was in Griswold's boat.

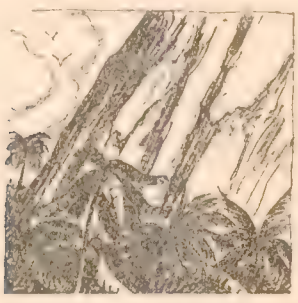
The thought of Knowles' danger prompted Kelly to action. He issued a low-voiced order to the paddlers and standing, turned squarely around.

"Professor Knowles," Kelly's voice, slow and distinct, carried above the hissing of the water, "I think you should know that the outer currents of the Pongo moves fast upstream, and the inner goes down at the same speed. Take it mighty easy at the corners. About halfway

through we'll hit a big whirlpool, stretching from bank to bank. Watch how we navigate and you'll be all right."

When Kelly finished, Griswold roared, "Are you tryin' to tell me what to do?" But Kelly grinned as he faced the river again, for Griswold had listened as carefully as any.

On either side, for a height of a thousand feet, towered sheer walls of rock.



Within the gorge the river was a scant thirty yards of winding, twisting stubborn strength. Each short stretch was like a deep shaft down which the sun drifted intermittently. The roar of the water now was deafening. Commands were useless, and Griswold, at the tag end, subsided in muttered oaths. For here, unquestionably, Kelly was the boss. Each eye was strained to the Irishman's broad, expressive back; each hand unquestioningly followed his slightest movement. Sweat poured from laboring bodies; deftly, under Kelly's guidance, jagged rocks were fended off, the swift down stream was avoided, and at each dangerous corner paddles churned the water to a froth.

Time seemed to stand still. The Pongo was a seething mess of boulders, boiling water and cunning whirlpools. The crafts made erratic progress, now swiftly shooting ahead, now drifting in slow terrifying suspense. Two miles had been traversed when Kelly turned back an anxious, wordless glance.

Before them appeared the great whirlpool. Fifty yards across it lay, washing wall to wall of the Pongo canyon. Its greedy maw rose and fell with the slow regularity of breathing lungs. Kelly jerked his head, and on the far outer rim the followers saw a narrow strip of white sand. Nearby was a slippery, precarious ledge of rock. Unhesitatingly Kelly stepped out, gripping the smooth rock with his feet, holding the gunwale of the canoe with great muscular hands.

Slowly, tugging against puny human efforts, against the magnetic sucking vortex, the boat moved around the outer edge of the swirl. Kelly clambered aboard; swiftly now the paddles lashed across a boiling maelstrom of waves seething against rough boulders at the base of the cliff. The canoe swung clear, and still in the grip of the outer rim, neared the *playa*.

Kelly grasped a line and plunged overboard to his waist in swirling water. Momentously he struggled, gaining a handhold of two rocks on which he bighted the line. The light canoe jerked to a stop, and hand over hand, Kelly pulled it to the beach.

Masi was next. He sat proudly erect, no fear in the eyes above his sweating body. Overboard he plunged and grasped Kelly's outstretched hand, and safety.

Only the boat with Knowles, Griswold and Mitasuni remained. With increasing swiftness it swung around the great whirlpool, and Kelly suddenly saw that Griswold was in a blue funk, his eyes staring, shoulders sagged, hands inert at his sides.

With an angry warning yell Kelly raced again into the water. Grabbing up a coiled line he looped the end around his waist. Masi, alert to the danger, tied the free end to himself as Kelly began to swim.

SWIFTLY he moved as the force seized him. Churning the water with powerful strokes he gained the boat. The line about Kelly's middle tightened and the stolid Indians behind Masi pulled. Slowly, with agonizing indecision, the canoe moved toward the beach.

"That was a foolhardy thing to do," Professor Knowles commented briefly when the journey had been resumed. "I've been watching you, Kelly. Please give up the idea of making grandstand plays for favor. Your efforts are embarrassing to Mr. Griswold and annoying to me. Perhaps you will recall that you yourself stated the conditions under which you joined the expedition."

Surprised, but too sensible to be hurt, Kelly accepted the rebuff without protest. Griswold, scared in the Pongo, was openly triumphant again and Kelly avoided him. All of the seething turmoil that was in him he threw into a dogged fight against the river as mile after mile of new wild territory drifted behind the flashing paddle blades.

In camp, the third day beyond the Pongo, Griswold was his old self, roaring about, issuing uncalled-for and reluctantly obeyed orders.

"Line up!" Griswold shouted. "We're going to have a firearm drill!"

Wonderingly, Kelly stood with the rest and watched the stocky boss from inquisitive eyes.

"We're in Jivaro country now," Griswold barked, as general-fashion, he strode up and down before his paddlers in an act for Knowles' benefit. "Any minute we may run into some of the devils. We'll shoot first and ask questions after. No stinkin' headhunter's going to get Lonzo Griswold's scalp."

The expression of concern and dismay on Kelly's face caused Griswold to pause sneeringly. "What's eatin' you?" he leered. "Afraid?"

Kelly's face was a grim mask. "I'm amazed at your ignorance, that's all," he said quietly.

From a rock at the rivers' edge, Knowles spoke sharply, "Don't get smart, Kelly. Preparedness is a good thing. And please don't start an argument each time someone asks you to do something."

Griswold, listening, hunched his shoulders. "Yes," he bellowed, cocking his fists. "You'll do what I say. I've had enough o' your insults. Put up your hands!"

Knowles interposed again, more sharply. "Stop it, Griswold. We've had enough trouble."

But Griswold was not to be halted. Insanely angry, the pent-up fury of his unsuccessful attempts on William Kelly broke loose. His wild swing caught the unprepared Irishman full in the mouth and Kelly sprawled in the sand.

Kelly shook his head and raised himself slowly to his feet. In his ears were ringing the professor's commands to stop. But Griswold was coming on. The stocky man's fists were poised and murderous lights gleamed in his pig-like eyes. Again he swung viciously and landed a jarring blow in Kelly's mouth.

As Kelly straightened up his face was a terrifying sight. Gone now was the dogged restraint that had characterized it for days. Blood spilled from his mouth, reddening his chin, and his lips were drawn back in an animal snarl. Above the cold intensity of his face his eyes were wild with a light of insane joy. Swiftly, like the jungle tigre, he moved in. A crushing uppercut stiffened Griswold and set him on his heels. Then, blow after blow pounded the big man's stomach. A dazzling left snapped Griswold's head back, a right to the heart sent a shock through his powerful frame.

Straight from Kelly's wide shoulder another jolting left exploded in Griswold's face, and the stocky boss pitched forward into the sand.

Griswold was licked. Groveling, cowering, he emitted whining screams, "Save me! Stop him! He's gone mad!"

Kelly stood balanced for a moment. Reluctantly, the tension passed from his body. Gradually he dropped his arms, and with superb control turned his back. From a clearing, red-tinged haze he saw the faces of the expressionless Indians, and the look of disgusted contempt in the professor's

accusing eyes. Shrugging, his shoulders sagged and he advanced a step.

"Kelly, look out!"

Knowles was on his feet, eyes wide, pointing. But the warning was too late. Swiftly, from the rear, the crouching Griswold brought down a heavy stone upon Kelly's unguarded head.

PROF. HARRISON KNOWLES expertly cauterized and bandaged the ugly wound on the half-conscious Kelly's head. Knowles' thin face was stern and his brown eyes held unaccustomed hardness. All too rudely he had been pulled from his dreams into cold realization.

"Those references of yours," Knowles said coldly to the sour-faced Griswold. "I presume they were forged?"

"Forged?" Griswold licked his swollen lips and brief worried glints came into his eyes. "I don't get you."

Knowles laughed harshly. "Come now, Griswold. Let's put aside all pretense. I can see in a new light certain events of the trip since Barranca. I am forced to the belief that you are not only an undesirable coward, but an utterly incompetent one."

A mixture of rage and amazement passed swiftly over Lonzo Griswold's features to be replaced by a look of amused cunning. He hitched up his trousers and stood with feet apart, right hand carelessly near his belt gun.

"Okay, Perfessor," Griswold grinned, his eyes shifting rapidly to search out the positions of Masi and the others. "That's a lot of nasty names you're callin' me. Mostly I don't know what you're talkin' about. If you mean Kelly here, he challenged my authority and I acted only accordin' to my rights."

The youthful archaeologist spoke with loathing. "You are an incompetent," he repeated sternly. "Had it not been for Kelly, we would have drowned in the Pongo. He saved your life as well as mine. I have no further need for your services, Mr. Griswold."

The amusement went out of Lonzo Griswold's face. His right hand dragged the belt gun from its holster.

"Okay, you," Griswold snarled. "I'm anythin' you want to call me, but you can't fire me, because I'm boss o' this expedition. We're goin' on!"

"Put the gun down," Knowles ordered sharply.

Griswold backed slowly, keeping the Indians within range. "Oh, no!" he said. "From now on this gun's not goin' to be put down. You're a wise guy. You figured out where the Incas kept their gold. Well, now you can figure how you're goin' to get me to it so's you can stay alive!"

LONZO GRISWOLD, sheltered from the torrential downpour by a canopy of palms, sat on the rifles and fondled the revolver in his lap as he looked over the glistening backs of the paddlers. Griswold was convinced that Kelly was stalling, that his period of convalescence was being purposefully drawn out. Trying to outsmart him, was he? The watching Griswold leered. What a jolt Mr. Kelly would get if he could read Griswold's mind and foresee his plans.

For Griswold had it all figured now. Piece by piece, from Barranca on, he had put it together. The Pongo had given him the last necessary part. His scheme was flawless, leaving no embarrassing loopholes before any possible future courts of inquiry. There would be the testimony of the Indians that Kelly had rebelled. That would excuse his continuing the expedition under force of arms. And as for the testimony of Kelly, or Knowles——

Knowles would lead Griswold to the Inca mines. There, while the professor was mooning over signs and objects, Griswold would load two canoes with the precious yellow metal. Then, returning—Griswold's puffy lips cracked in a grin as he thought of his plan to send Kelly and Knowles alone through the Pongo. Griswold would see to it that the boat would

not get through. There would be no witnesses. He would proceed at his leisure, claim the cargo by right of survival, and emerge a rich man.

Lonzo Griswold was almost happy despite the discomfort of his cramped quarters until his eyes lighted on Professor Harrison Knowles. Pale and thin, the archaeologist was, and his eyes were too bright. He didn't look so good, and that was a new worry. If Knowles keeled over now, all these weeks of hell would be thrown away.

"Hey you, Masi!" Griswold roared. "Put in on this beach and we'll make camp!"

THE rain was ceaseless, and sweeping down from the *cordilleras*, bitterly cold. Twice, because of the river's rapid rise, the camp had been moved to higher ground. Now, on a bleak hill, white men and Indians huddled together in the meager protection of the boats. No word was spoken; Griswold crouched grimly and alone. The light of madness was in his eyes, the ready gun clutched in his hand. Behind him were the rifles, the precious diminishing supply of food, and the last half-empty flask of rum.

Kelly, his head swathed in grimy sodden bandages, lay stiffly in the lee of a long canoe. From half-shut eyes he watched Griswold, studying him as he had for days. Not once had he been able to surprise the stocky man in sleep. Griswold was wide awake, and stark mad. From his eyes glittered the fever of Inca gold; forgotten was the mounting danger of starvation, the impending threat of Knowles' collapse.

Hourly Knowles had grown weaker. No longer would his stomach hold food. His hand, as Kelly reached out and touched it, was dry and burning. His eyes stared brightly from dark hollows. Knowles was slipping, plunging deep into a morass in which only his indomitable spirit was keeping him afloat.

Kelly stirred. As swiftly as it had come, the shower passed. Overhead, clouds parted and for the first time in weeks the sun blinded the exhausted group. Below them hissed the swollen yellow waters of the river. Beyond was the wild, lush tangled growth of the interminable jungle. At their backs——

Knowles was on his feet. Burning eyes distended from their sockets as he raised a shaking arm and pointed to the west.

"The three peaks!" he croaked. "Valverde's peaks——"

His arms sank down and he swayed gently. Kelly caught him and eased his shaking body to the ground.

Griswold crowded forward. "What did he say?" he snarled, covering Kelly with his gun.

"What difference does it make?" Kelly's eyes blazed angrily. "The man's done in. He needs——"

"Never mind what he needs!" Griswold yelled. "Tell me what he said, or I'll——"

Griswold's threat ended in a gurgling gasp. From the leafy cover to the west had come a swift, soundless shaft. Turning, he stabbed with the pistol and at its roar a brown man tumbled into the glade. Then Griswold tore at his throat. From the back of his thick neck extended a slim arrow, and from his mouth welled frothy bubbles.

THERE was neither thought nor opportunity for escape. Kelly ignored the advancing circle of scowling brown men and worked swiftly on Griswold even as he spoke low assuring words to Masi and the paddlers. Gripping the shaft in both hands he pulled gently, then jerked to get it free. Swearing, he yanked a clasp knife from his pocket and sawed at the raw flesh. Extracting the arrow at last, he glanced critically at its tip.

"No poison," Kelly grunted, "although I'm damned if I know why I'm bothering with you!" Tearing the bandage from his own head he wrapped a length around Griswold's neck.

"Now," the big Irishman growled. Straightening to his full height he glared at the silent, encircling savages. An awesome picture he made, with the sunlight transforming his flaming curls into an aura of golden light. "You," he singled out a spindle-legged, deep-chested Jivaro who seemed to be chief. Speaking in *Quichua*, Kelly roared, "You have tried to kill *Chulla Chaquicuna*, the God of the Forest! *Supai*, the Evil One, will place a curse upon the head of you and your children!"

The savages drew back, muttering uneasily amongst themselves, throwing questioning glances at their accused leader. He, however, was unmoved. From the tops of his eyes he glared at the tall, flame-topped *huiracuche*. "Who speaks?" he challenged sullenly.

Beside Kelly, Knowles stirred. Raising a shaking finger he pointed. *"Yacu mámam,"* he croaked.

The chorus of muttering grew. *Yacu Mámam!* A powerful God! And *Chulla Chaquicuna*—

"The God of Rivers and Rain," Knowles continued, raising himself up. "He sent his son to visit your people in peace, to discover your lost secrets so that the wandering sons of the Potato Diggers might return to their power. But you have tried to kill his brother, the God of the Forest. Now *Yacu Mámam* will cause the rains to cease and the rivers to dry up. Your people shall return to withering dust, and the buzzards shall spit your dry sand from their beaks!"

A fearful threat, that. For a moment they stood. Prone on his face, *Chulla Chaquicuna* moaned as his rich red blood soaked the bandages; Knowles sat, staring fixedly beyond the uneasy Jivaros at the three green peaks. The Indian paddlers, stolidly resigned to death, squatted woodenly. And Kelly, wrathful, huge, towering like a vengeful God, sought out with his piercing eyes each shivering savage that encircled him.

The tension broke. Abruptly, two Jivaros brought their wounded brother with his blowgun and laid him at Kelly's feet. Swiftly again the big man went to work, probing with the clasp knife. Griswold's bullet had smashed into the abdomen, a nasty wound. Already the warrior was unconscious.

Kelly grunted and stood up. "Take us to your village," he commanded. "I shall save this one's life, but the curse of my father shall not escape you if *Chulla Chaquicuna* dies!"

Beyond tough chaparral a tunnel-like road had been cut from the jungle's matted growth. Here the Jivaros trotted on ahead with their burden of wounded, and Knowles, buoyed by the excitement of discovery and an enforced draught of rum, ambled along muttering half-coherent words:

"Old road—straight and plainly marked—probably built under Pachacutec—"

The ground rose slowly, and with abruptness the road broadened into a well-kept *chacra*. Grass-roofed huts dotted the clearing, and beyond was the bank of a stream. Westward, lush green jungle spread to the base of the shadowy peaks. Blue-gray giants outlined by the sinking sun. Knowles, at Kelly's side, raised his shivering body on tiptoe and grabbed at Kelly's arm.

"Look!" The professor's voice was a hoarse croak. "That hill over there——"

Kelly looked. A scant quarter-mile from the village, rearing from the tangle of green growth, was a knob of crumbling piled-up granite. It was vine-covered and sodden with the unmistakable decay of ages.

"That hill," Knowles croaked. His thin fingers on Kelly's arm tightened spasmodically.

"That hill—is—a—temple!"

"FEEL any better?"

Kelly asked the question as he paused in his stomping about the hut's interior and inspected the figure on the rough pole bed.

Knowles pushed himself up on an el-

bow. "I feel better," he announced slowly "but weak."

"Good," Kelly grunted. "One of the Jivaro medicine men made you some broth. Very special. Among other things it contained a spider's teeth. I fed it to you last night while you were muttering about Machu Picchu and a lot of other stuff."

Knowles grimaced. "Thanks for telling me," he grinned weakly. "I feel much better now. Where's Griswold?"

"I dunno," Kelly frowned. "Bein' as we told 'em he was *Chulla Chaquicuna,* they got all the medicine men in the place workin' on him. He's in the big lodge, the one nearest the river, I think."

"And the Jivaro who was shot?" Experimentally, Knowles dangled his feet over the bunk's side and sat erect.

"He'll pull through, but you better take it easy," Kelly growled. "We got to figure a way to get out of this place alive. Can't spend no Inca gold when you're dead, even if we do find it."

Knowles was silent for a moment, his thin face absorbed in thought. "Kelly," he said as if to himself, "did I see a temple, or was I dreaming?"

"I guess you saw one. That's what you called it, anyhow."

"Good. And it's not above a quarter of a mile from here?"

Kelly scowled. "Look here, Prof, you're a sick man. Forget archaeology for a while and concentrate on gettin' well. You got fever—"

Knowles shrugged impatiently. "I've had it before. My experience has taught me that I'll be all right between attacks. If I can gauge the frequency of attacks and make plans accordingly, we have nothing to worry about."

Kelly stared admiringly at the drawn face with its indomitable eyes. "You got plenty of guts," he sighed. "But take it easy. We still have Lonzo to contend with. If he pulls through, no tellin' how he'll treat us. And if he don't—" He paused and kicked at the hard earth of the floor. "We told the Jivaros what we'd do, and if we don't do it, they'll carve us from the shoulders up."

Knowles smiled. "You're trying to scare me. We'll get out. And while I'm still conscious, give me all the matches you have, and the rest of the rum."

Kelly creased his face into a ferocious scowl. "What're you goin' to do, get drunk and set fire to the place?" but he handed over the matches and the flask.

A shadow fell across the doorway. In came a squat, bright-eyed Jivaro woman bearing a steaming bowl. *"Giamanchi,"* she grunted, and after a fleeting survey of the tall, red-haired white god, departed,

"They feed us good," Kelly grinned. "If you're goin' to get drunk you better eat somethin' first. Can't say much for their utensils. Look at this pot. Green, greasy and dirty as a Brooklyn gas house."

Knowles took the bowl, and then his eyes protruded from his flushed face. With an exclamation he dumped the unsavory *giamanchi* on the floor. Snatching up a small stone implement he scraped away a portion of the encrusted filth on the bowl's surface. Dully, a yellow gleam showed through.

"Kelly!" Knowles' voice was thin with suppressed excitement. "Good God, man, this is a Fire Bowl! It probably dates from the invasion of Tupac Yupanqui! It's——"

"It's solid gold," Kelly supplemented in a growling voice. "If they ever feed Lonzo Griswold with one of these things, you and me are finished."

A GROUP of thin-breasted women, methodically shewing *yuca* for the preparation of *giamanchi,* paid little attention to William Kelly as he wandered in apparent indifference. The lean, sun-blackened redhead seemed lazy and half-asleep as he moved aimlessly through the village, stretching and yawning in the merciless glare of the sun.

But behind the mask of boredom, Kelly was vitally alert, keyed to a high pitch of

efficiency. For he had heard, two days now, the voice of Griswold. Not so gusty nor booming in the past, but nonetheless steady and without weakness. From the largest and most pretentious of the huts it issued. And the voice told a story, even though its owner was hidden. It told that Griswold was recovering. Moreover, it told that the bulky boss had cast the die; saved from death, he was continuing in the role of *Chulla Chaquicuna* to assume command of the tribe.

All this and more Kelly learned by his apparently innocent meanderings. He learned that the rifles and supplies had been left at the last camp on the banks of the stream. Too superstitious to touch the white men's belongings as yet, the Jivaros had daily dispatched medicine men to dispel the evil spirits surrounding them, and when *Chulla Chaquicuna* was again ready to walk, the goods would be claimed.

And then, before a hut from which came muttered prayers and moaning, Kelly cast discretion to the winds and poked his face through the door. In the semi-darkness within he saw crouched the frightened down-river Indian paddlers, Masi, Mitasuni and the rest.

No chance he had to speak, for Jivaros were crowding from Griswold's hut toward him. But his presence had been enough. It told Masi that hope remained and a time would come.

"Where are you going?" the head man of the oncoming Jivaros grunted at Kelly. His small head was thrust forward on his deep chest. It had been he who fired the arrow into Griswold.

"No place," Kelly answered laconically. He balanced with quiet deliberation, and with a swiftness unseen by the remaining savages brought his huge fist upwards to the point of the headman's jaw.

Soundless, the Jivaro crumpled. His followers uttered a startled howl and spread fanwise, casting frightened eyes at the towering, grim-faced hostage.

"When you talk to me, show some respect," Kelly commanded. Unhurriedly he presented his back and walked the length of the *chacra* to his own hut. Inside he grinned as he blew on his knuckles, but the grin died from his face as he stared at the empty interior.

Knowles had vanished.

THE sun was high in the heavens as two cautious and unwilling Jivaros escorted the fearsome William Kelly from his hut. Both sides of the village street were lined with glowering, silent warriors. Onward the growing phalanx pushed until suddenly it stopped. The lines parted, and at the head of the street was revealed a feather-robed individual in a throne-like chair.

Lonzo Griswold glared as he eyed the prisoner before him. The bandage around his throat served to heighten the incongruity of his mixed costume, but in the eyes of the warriors *Chulla Chaquicuna* had come down from the Sun to preside over them.

"So *Yacu Mámam* has decided that he will dry up the rivers and stop the rains," Griswold sneered, fixing venomous eyes on Kelly. "So he has begun by striking down my brother."

A chorus of "Ahs!" welled from the savage gathering at the words, and warriors pressed threateningly forward.

Griswold pompously raised his hand. "Stay," he ordered. "I will question *Yacu Mámam* in his own tongue." Then, the sneer gone from his face, he voiced terse words, "Where's that damned Knowles?"

Kelly grinned. "What's it to you? You're doin' all right."

Griswold's skin became livid. "Don't get smart with me. I got the upper hand now. Your head'd look good on a bamboo stick."

"Yours wouldn't," Kelly retorted. "Yours wouldn't look good any place."

Griswold restrained himself with difficulty. Raising his hand he again launched into the *Quichua dialect*, "So it shall be. *Yacu Mánam* still insists that he will bring a

curse on the heads of my innocent brothers. But I will tell you something. This is not *Yacu Mámam* at all. This is an impostor!"

Frenzied shouting greeted these words, and Kelly knew that the Jivaros needed but a single sign from Griswold to run him through with their ready spears.

Kelly thought rapidly. So far as he was able to judge, the only weapon carried by Lonzo Griswold was the belt gun. Swiftly his eyes darted about, seeking an avenue of escape. Beyond and to the side he saw, forgotten in the moment, Masi and his me[illegible] His eyes carried a swift message, and then, suddenly fixed, glanced beyond.

"Look!" Kelly shouted, and pointed to the crumbling pile of rock that Knowles had called a temple.

Griswold, puzzled, shot an anxious, sidewise glance and stiffened in astonishment. Near the apex of the vine-covered hill blazed a dazzling figure. Now and again from the figure's hands long shafts of piercing light came down to rest on the throne and blind the usurper in it.

"It's a trick!" Griswold roared, shielding his eyes. "It's a damned trick!"

The warriors milled about in muttering panic, watching the apparition on the hill, fascinated by its molten brilliance. Close to Kelly now, too close for his escape, they packed, herded by *Chulla Chaquicuna's* cries, stayed by the terrifying flashes that illumined his face.

AND then, suddenly, a groan went up. To the left of the figure a pillar of flame was shooting heavenward. And then, to his right, another blaze licked hungrily at a tinder-like pile and sent sparks into the smokeless air.

Again the blinding flashes enveloped Lonzo Griswold. Uneven they were, irregular; Kelly watched narrowly over the heads of the howling crowd and counted, three short, one long. It was Morse! That was Knowles up there, using the Fire Bowl to signal to him in the International Code!

"—S-W-O-L-D G-U-N H-E-A-D F-O-R B-O-A-T-S I H-A-V-E G-R-I-S-W-O-L-D G-U-N H-E-A-D F-O-R—"

"I have Griswold's gun! Head for the boats!"

All eyes were on the piles of flame shooting out of the age-old hill. Shouts of fear and despair commingled with Griswold's screaming orders as the Jivaros stampeded in terror. Kelly, slipping through, gave an anxious glance to Masi, and then with the huts as a cover, made for the jungle tunnel.

"We're goin' back to get Knowles!" Kelly commanded grimly as he shoved rifles into the hands of Masi and Mitasuni, and thrust home the breech of his Winchester. "You fellows get the canoes in the water, and be ready to paddle!"

Already, from the road beyond the chaparral came sounds of pursuit. An arrow pinged as it lodged in the upraised dugout, and Kelly's Winchester roared a defiant answer. Then, like a less-loud sharper echo, the bark of the belt gun drifted from the thicket.

"Hold your fire!" Kelly yelled. "That's Knowles!"

The revolver sounded again, and from the jungle burst the laboring, gold-clad figure of the professor. Behind in full pursuit ran a spear-armed Jivaro, and his lunge ended in a sagging stumble as Kelly's unerring Winchester dealt death.

Panting, utterly exhausted, Knowles flopped at the crest of the protecting rocks as eager hands pulled him to safety. Behind, into the glade, a dozen close-packed spearmen charged. From the covert of chaparral unseen marksmen loosed a hail of arrows. And then, breathless with rage, Lonzo Griswold burst through like a charging tapir.

Too late Griswold realized that the tunnel had ended. Skidding in his tracks he floundered, open and unprotected in the clearing.

"Come on, *Chulla Chaquicuna!*" Kelly yelled with grim humor. "Take your choice

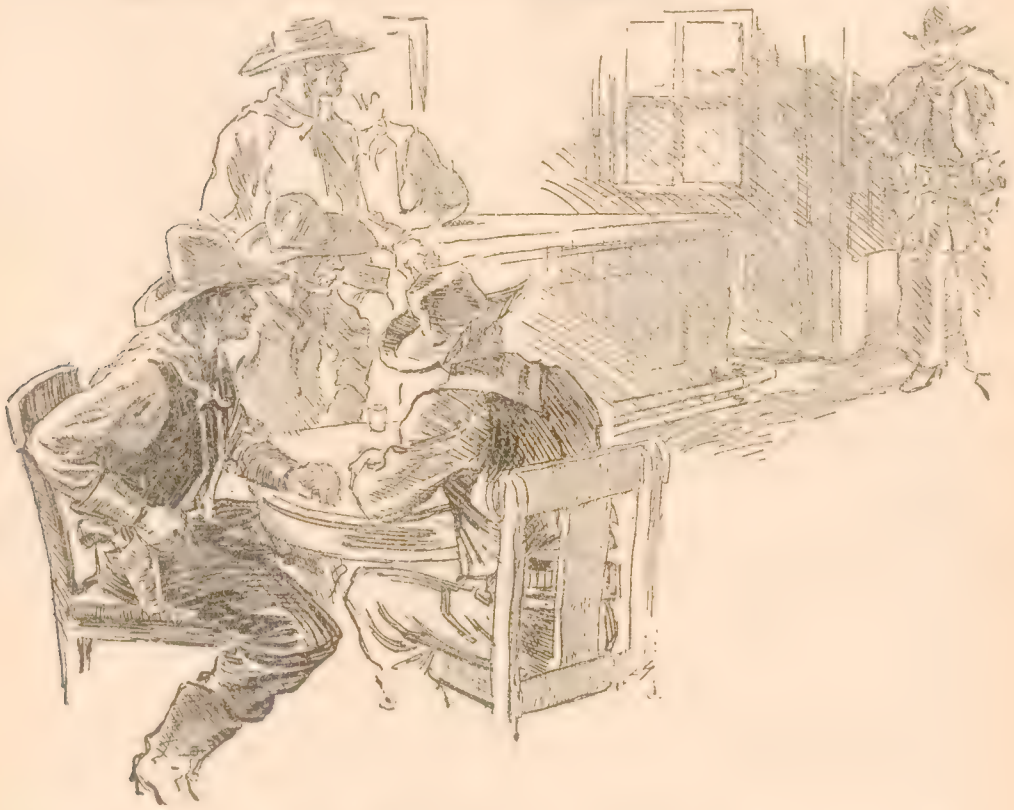
of chances between my Winchester or the courts in Barranca. I got the top hand now!"

Slowly the crestfallen Griswold stumbled forward. About him the spearsmen's arms were lowered and the arrows were stilled. Silent, disgruntled, the baffled Jivaros watched, and then with startling swiftness, faded into the jungle.

WILLIAM KELLY closed the door carefully behind him and grinned as he jingled the coins in the pocket of his new suit of dazzling linens. "Well, Harry," he said, "it was quite a trip."

At the paper-littered deal table Professor Harrison Knowles looked up blankly, and then smiled as he pushed aside his voluminous notes. "Hello, Bill," he responded softly. "Indeed it was. We've added another page to Inca history. We've returned some relics to substantiate our claims, and we've placed the scope of Tupac Yupanqui, son of the great Pachacutec, in a new range."

Kelly walked over and glowered from the window at the grass and adobe huts of Iquitos. "Yep," he said, "and what's more we placed Lonzo Griswold where he won't gum up any more scientific expeditions. How's about a drink of that Scotch on your bureau?"



First gold, then silver, then—

KING COPPER

A long novelette of Bluff City in the next SHORT STORIES

By Frank Gruber

Even the Sergeant of the Mounted Was Willing to Hand it to Cockeye as a Detective

COCKEYE'S REWARD

By H. S. M. KEMP

Author of "Cockeye Method," "Dead Man's Hand," etc.

OLD Cockeyed McDonald heard the roar of Ken Norman's incoming Lockheed, grabbed his hat and was out of the cabin in time to see the plane hit water and come taxiing shorewards. When it beached, Ken Norman got out, followed by Sergeant Bill Nettleton of Jackfish Lake. Bill Nettleton explained the reason for the call.

"Newt Hammond had a canoeload of fur stolen off him just south of his place on Balsam River. Got the news early this morning. Ken pulled in a little while afterwards, so here we are, and we're on our way"

"On your way?" repeated Cockeye. "Y'mean about forty miles out of the way."

"But I need gas to fly on," pointed out Ken. "Where's that drum I dumped off last week?"

Cockeye thumbed toward a brush-covered pile. "There she is. I don't trust that stuff more'n I trust dynamite. Not out in the sun."

Ken and the sergeant rolled the drum aboard, then Cockeye cuffed his hat over one eye and scratched the back of his head.

"Me, I'm waitin' for Fat Morris to get in from Snare River. Him'n me figger on goin' out to town. But with time on my hands and a crime in the offin', I'd kinda like to take the trip with you fellers and see what she's all about."

Bill Nettleton grinned. "You're a better detective than half of the tramps that call themselves one. So how about it, Ken? Got room for the old-timer?"

"There's room for Cockeye in any kite I fly," stated Ken.

So when Cockeye had his blankets and bedroll stored aboard, Ken turned for the open lake. They roared out of the bay, lifted over the Consolidated's workings and headed west and north. In a little under two hours—which made it about noon—they were at Balsam River.

It was some little time since Cockeye had seen the settlement, so from the cabin of the banking Lockheed, he looked with interest at the scene beneath him. There was the clearing itself on the north bank of the Balsama— half-moon that looked as though it had been chewed out of the solid bush. On a green sward was the usual scatter of Indian teepees and shacks, with a trading post at one end of it and the latticed masts of a radio-station at the other.

A wonderful thing, radio, Cockeye told himself. 'Twasn't long ago that if a feller wanted to send word to Bill Nettleton it'd take him a week by either canoe or dog-team.

But here was the sergeant himself, right on the spot within a few hours of a crime taking place. Yeah; radio was a wonderful thing. It made the way of the transgressor tougher'n ever.

Then Ken was going down, due to hit shore in front of the radio-station.

They got out on the wharf, to be met by Ginger Mackie, the operator. With Ginger was another man, short but heavily-built, with a red and sweaty face and twinkling blue eyes. Sergeant Bill Nettleton did the honors.

"Boys, meet Cockeye McDonald — the man who made the strike that put Cariboo Lake on the map. Cockeye's got more money than he knows what to do with, but after forty years in this country, you can't chase him out."

The fat man, Newt Hammond, grinned. "Then try tradin', Cockeye. Buy this joint off me, and see how soon *I'll* get out!"

"Wouldn't do me no good," demurred Cockeye. "I ain't no business head. The Nitchies'ud have me broke in no time. But by what the sergeant was tellin' me, you've had a little tough luck outa the ordinary."

Newt Hammond sobered. "But the luck'll be tougher for somebody else if Bill Nettleton knows his job."

"Knowing the job isn't everything," said Nettleton. "It's often a matter of getting the breaks. But we'll go somewhere, soon, where you can spill your particular grief."

They turned, leaving Ken Norman to anchor his plane.

"Let's go up to the shack," suggested Ginger Mackie. "Won't be bothered there."

THE radio-station consisted of one big room. It harbored the apparatus itself, but it left ample space for Ginger's living quarters. Here, in the contrasting coolness, the men found seats on chairs and on Ginger's bunk. Bill Nettleton, big, rawboned, unbuttoned his tunic, sat down on one of the chairs and began to fill his pipe.

"Okay, Hammond; go ahead. Seems like you got stuck for a bunch of fur."

Hammond nodded grimly. "But that

ain't all. There's the murder of Johnny-boy."

Bill Nettleton, pipe halfway to his teeth, frowned sharply. "Murder of Johnny-boy? I knew nothing about that!"

Ginger Mackie cut in. "Blame it on the weather. Static was so bad I was lucky to get any message through at all. I guess Hobbs only got the half of it."

The sergeant grunted, and looked at Cockeye. "Seems like we've not only got to figure out where a canoeload of fur went, but there's a little matter of murder to be cleaned up as well."

"Let Newt tell his story," suggested Cockeye. "We'll know more about it then."

"Sure," said Hammond. "It was like this—late yesterday afternoon I started Johnny-boy and Pete Owl-eyes down the river with seven thousand dollars worth of fur. Eight bales of it; and it represented all the collection since Christmas. They were using a big nineteen-footer and my six-horse outboard. Down at Long Rapid they went ashore. The rapid is about a mile long and the portage goes around it. Pete Owl-eyes tells me they carried the canoe across first, then made three trips over with the fur. That left the engine and the paddles, the grub-box and their own belongings. That called for one more trip; and they started back.

"But about a hundred yards or so up the portage, Johnny-boy wanted a drink. There's a spring in the bush near the path, where the water's ice-cold. Pete says he went ahead, expecting Johnny-boy to catch up with him; but he never saw his pardner again until he came back with the motor. Then he found Johnny-boy sprawled out near the foot of the portage, with his head bashed in and the fur gone."

Sergeant Bill Nettleton nodded slowly. "I see. But just what do you mean by 'gone'? The fur, or the fur and canoe?"

"Both," answered Hammond. "Pete tells me they set the canoe down, half in and half out the water and piled the fur alongside it. When he reached the place on his last trip, there wasn't neither fur nor canoe in sight."

BILL NETTLETON digested it. "I don't know the river at all. Any time I come in here I fly in. And generally cross-country. But tell me, if that last trip up the portage and back again took Pete Owl-eyes, say, half an hour, would the fellers that swiped the fur have time to load and get out of sight before he turned up? They'd have to go downstream, that's a cinch."

"Which'd be easy," said Hammond. "The river takes a swing around a point a hundred yards or so below the portage. They could chuck the fur aboard the canoe in five minutes and be out of sight in five more."

Again the sergeant nodded. "Easy enough to see what happened. When Johnny-boy was getting his drink he must have heard something that sounded suspicious. He came back to where the fur was piled and caught the thieves in the act. Apparently he tangled with them—and got himself killed."

"Whoever pulled the stunt played practically a sure thing," was Hammond's comment. "It would have been no trick at all to lift the fur, though they might have trouble in getting it out of the country."

"And there might be no trouble to that," suggested Cockeye. "Feller had only to hide it some place till the hue and cry had blown over, then he could lug it out a jag at a time."

"Or have a plane waiting some place convenient," put in Ginger Mackie, "and haul the whole thing out at once."

Later, while the others were discussing the affair, Ginger set about the preparation of a meal. Ken Norman walked in, and Ginger interrupted again.

"Shove out of the way, fellers, while I fix the table. It's about noon, and no murder-mystery can make up for dinner with me."

He commenced to set out dishes, and the

sergeant turned to Newt Hammond again.

"I'd like a talk with the other Indian, this Pete Owl-eyes. Where'll I find him?"

The trader pointed to a teepee in the village a little off to one side.

"There's his hangout, and he oughta be around. His English ain't so hot—"

"Neither is my Cree," grinned the sergeant. "But we'll navigate."

Hammond drew out his watch and looked at it. "Yeah; it's nearly noon, and I'm hungry myself." He stood up. "Well, after you've talked with Owl-eyes, drop down to the store and we'll go over the case from there."

AS HAMMOND went out, Ginger turned to the policeman. "If you and Cockeye want to make this your headquarters, help yourselves. There's only the one cot, but the floorboards are kinda springy."

The policeman accepted for both of them. "And we might's well go down, Cockeye, and bring up our packs. But how about you, Ken? Pulling out, or staying over?"

"Pulling out," grinned Ken. "If Ginger'll feed me before I go."

But clear of the radio-station, the sergeant turned to Cockeye.

"Well, old-timer, what d'you make of things?"

"Make of things" echoed Cockeye. "Ain't you a bit previous, Bill?"

"Oh, I ain't asking who did it," pointed out the policeman. "What I mean, how've you got this thing laid out."

"Well, it was a white man's job," decided Cockeye. "The Nitchies are gen'ly pretty honest; and anyways, no Nitchie'd have nerve enough to pull a job like this. No, I'd hunt me someone who knew just when the fur was goin' to move. Somebody, too, who was tough enough to handle this Johnny-boy. I might even check over anyone who was hard up, or who had a grudge ag'inst Trader Hammond. The only white man I know around here is Ginger Mackie. And, somehow, Ginger looks okay to me."

THEY returned with their bedrolls and packsacks, ate, and when Ken Norman had taken off for town, dropped down to the Indian village and made medicine with Pete Owl-eyes. They found the Indian to be middle-aged, intelligent, and anxious to help; but all he told was merely a repetition of what they had heard from Newt Hammond. So they left him, and threading their way through the village, came finally to Hammond's trading-store.

"How'd it be," the sergeant suggested to Newt Hammond, "if we were to take a run down and have a look at the scene of the crime? There may be nothing much there, but it'll give us a picture of what things look like."

Hammond was agreeable enough, so the three piled into the trader's motor-driven canoe. They reached Long Portage, left the canoe and walked across.

Here the shoreline was pebbly, which seemed to rule out any hope that Bill Nettleton may have had of picking up tracks; but in spite of the disadvantage, he and Cockeye began to check things over.

Some slight success attended their efforts. In one or two places near the waterline they came across partial boot-tracks. These showed in spots where the sand had filtered in between the pebbles.

"Not much to get excited about," said Bill Nettleton. "Two inches of the edge of a bootsole aren't enough to work on."

"But they *are* boot-soles," pointed out Cockeye. "And I don't suppose many of the Nitchies go in for boots."

"No," agreed Hammond. "There ain't any that do."

Then Cockeye looked around him.

Muffled somewhat by distance came the booming of the rapids themselves, but here at the foot of the portage the river, though fast, was comparatively calm. A big eddy swirled shorewards, carrying flotsam upstream. Downstream, a few hundreds yards, was the point that Hammond had mentioned.

"Yeah, Newt," observed Cockeye. "I see what you mean. It wouldn't be no trick at all for a feller to load up the fur, shove out and disappear pretty sudden around that point. That's where your fur went."

"And that's what interests me," nodded Hammond. "A seven thousand dollar crack these tough times just about washes me up."

But there seemed to be nothing further to do here, so they retraced their steps over the portage to the canoe. But launching the canoe, Cockeye had a suggestion to make.

"How'd it be, Newt, if you was to turn out the whole village in one big search party? If the fur's anywhere around, somebody oughta locate it?"

Hammond stared at him for a moment; then, "By golly, you got something there!" he said. "If a reward is posted—say, a couple hundred bucks—the Nitchies'd go through the country like a fine-tooth comb."

"And if the fur ain't turned up then," agreed Bill Nettleton, "well, you're out nothing on the try."

BACK in the settlement, the sergeant asked Hammond where the body of Johnny-boy could be found.

"Up in his house—that straw-thatched one you can see from here."

"Think I'll go up and look it over," decided Nettleton. And to Cockeye, "Coming along?"

"No-o," said Cockeye; "I don't think I will. A Nitchie with his head caved in may be an inspirin' sight to a limb o' the law; but, somehow, I can get along without it."

So leaving the policeman to conduct his own investigation, Cockeye followed Newt Hammond back to the post. They sat on the counter discussing generalities until Nettleton returned. And following Nettleton, three other men walked in.

Two of these were Indians, who found seats on so many empty boxes provided for the purpose; the white man drew himself up onto the counter opposite.

Cockeye gave the man a perfunctory glance, but the sergeant nodded and remarked that for early summer the day was plenty warm.

"Quite warm," agreed the man. "Paddling in, I nearly roasted."

Bill Nettleton fished out his pipe. "Paddle far?"

"Three or four miles. And thank the Lord it was downstream."

Now Cockeye was able to give the man closer scrutiny. He might have been twenty-five or -six, fair skinned, and, save for a short yellow mustache, clean shaven. Looks alone hinted at English nationality, and his drawing accent emphasized it. Then Newt Hammond spoke up.

"Meet Sergeant Nettleton, Duke. And Cockeye McDonald. Duke Keating, boys."

Cockeye and the sergeant shook hands at the introduction, and Duke Keating gave a smile. "Glad to know you chaps—even if it took a murder to bring us together."

Bill Nettleton fell back against the opposite counter again. He swept a glance over Keating from the rough felt hat on his head to the high prospector boots on his feet. "Yes. And speaking of murder, anything you can do to help us out will be much appreciated."

Keating laughed. "Anything I can do won't help at all. I didn't commit the crime, and I wasn't there when the crime was committed."

Bill Nettleton shrugged. "Well, now; seeing that you've injected yourself into the argument, just where were you when the job was being pulled off?"

"At home, three or four miles up the

river. To be exact, I was planting a few rows of potatoes."

"Planting potatoes?" echoed the sergeant. "Not going in for farming, are you?"

"I may, at that. Fur-farming. Like Newt here."

"Keep out of it," grunted Newt Hammond. "This is my fourth year, and all I'm doing is to pay Lefty Horne sixty a month to help me go in the hole."

The sergeant picked up the name. "Who's Lefty Horne?"

"The feller that runs my fur-farm. I got a bunch of foxes seven miles up the river."

"Seven miles up the river, eh?" observed the sergeant. He looked across at Duke Keating. "Sort of a neighbor of yours."

"Oh, quite."

Cockeye didn't like the way Keating said that. Nor, apparently, did Bill Nettleton. For Nettleton was bluntly inquisitive.

"And what've you got against Lefty Horne?"

"Me? Against Lefty Horne?" The Englishman's brows went up. "I've nothing against him—particularly. Only, well, I like a man to wash once a week and take a bath once a year."

The sergeant gave a slight smile. "I'll have to meet Lefty Horne. And what other interesting characters," he asked Keating, "have you got on show around here."

Keating, too, smiled. "This isn't the place, Sergeant, for interesting characters. To be interesting, a man must be intelligent. And if he had any intelligence, he wouldn't stay up in this country at all."

"Including yourself?"

"Why not?"

COCKEYE couldn't see where all this talk was leading; but just then the Englishman slid down from his perch on the counter, tossed a dollar bill to Newt Hammond and asked for a can of tobacco. When he had gone out, Bill Nettleton turned to the trader. "If that duck isn't interesting, who is? What d'you know about him?"

"Not a lot. He blew in here a couple of years ago on the tail-end of a gold-rush we had. The rush petered out, but he stayed on. Traps a bit, prospects a bit more and, once in a great while, gets a piece of change from the Old Country. But as to who he is—well, we call him 'The Duke' and let it go at that."

"And from what he was sayin' about this Lefty Horne," interposed Cockeye, "said Lefty wouldn't seem to be no acquisition to the community. If he's as bad as The Duke says he is, why do you keep him on?"

Hammond shrugged his big shoulders. "Well, he's dirty and he's dumb, but he's easily satisfied. Then ag'in, you tell him to do a job, and he does it. And if he don't wash no oftener than he should—what of it? I don't live with the guy!"

Cockeye grinned. "And like Keating said, there ain't nobody else around here worth meetin'?"

"White men," stipulated Bill Nettleton.

"No," said Hammond. "Unless, of course, you want to include Chip Dorrance."

"Okay," prodded Nettleton. "Tell us about Chip."

"Not much to tell there. He calls himself a white man, but he's part Chipewyan Indian. That's where he gets his name. Him and Lefty are sort of brothers-in-law. They married sisters—native gals from Bear River."

"So Lefty's married?"

"Not any more," grinned Hammond. "She died last winter. The flu, some said. Others said it was too much work and too little grub."

"And what does Chip Dorrance do for a living?"

"Anybody he can. And when he can't, he traps. Spends his summers around the settlement and the winters up in the Bear River country."

Bill Nettleton gave a thoughtful grunt. "We've met Duke Keating, and we've yet to meet Lefty Horne and Chip Dorrance. If Lefty's up at your fox-farm, we won't be seeing him right away; but I'd like to run an eye over Chip."

"Shouldn't be hard to do," hazarded Hammond. "I'll get him down for a poker-game tonight and you boys can both set in."

BUT there was no need for Bill Nettleton to wait that long in meeting Chip Dorrance.

Dorrance and three Indians walked into the store as Bill Nettleton was on the point of going out. Newt Hammond called the sergeant back, introduced him to Dorrance, then told Dorrance that he was offering a two hundred dollar reward for the return of his fur.

The halfbreed grinned. He was a spare-built man, with broad, high cheekbones, deep black eyes, a thin mustache and almost chocolate coloring.

"Two hundred bucks, eh, Newt?" he said. "Nice pickin's for someone. But no one ain't apt to claim it."

"Why?" demanded the trader.

Dorrance shrugged. "You don't think the fellers that were wise enough to plan the hold-up like they did would be crazy enough to cache the fur some place where anyone could find it?"

"And I don't know about that," returned Hammond. "If the fur was cached handy, it'd have to be carried up into the bush. And if that's what happened, there ought to be a track or two that an Indian could find."

Dorrance shrugged again. "Mebbe. Anyways, it's worth the gamble."

Hammond then turned and outlined his plan to the three Indians. Broad grins crossed their faces, they nodded eagerly, and, whooping, they ran out. Within ten minutes there were thirty or forty more Indians gathered around the store. Hammond repeated his offer; and within another ten minutes the village seemed deserted, save for the women and kids.

Hammond, watching the start, grinned too. "A feller can sure get action for a couple of hundred bucks!"

But Chip Dorrance was not one of the search-party. He sat on the steps of the store, looking on. Cockeye, in the doorway, observed the fact.

"Ain't you goin'?" he asked the man.

"Me?" jeered Chip Dorrance. "I'll say I ain't. For one thing, the fur ain't likely to be around; and if it is and can be located, it'll take an Injun to smell it out."

Cockeye turned, and behind him Bill Nettleton was standing.

"How'd it be, Cockeye," suggested the policeman, "if we go down there again? He looked at the watch on his wrist. "It's only four o'clock; and if any of those Nitchies do strike gold, I'd like to be on hand when they do it."

"All right with me," said Cockeye. "If the boss'll lend us his canoe and kicker."

"Help yourself," said Hammond. "You know the way."

So once more that afternoon Bill Nettleton and Cockeye landed at Long Portage. A dozen canoes were beached at this end of the portage, but it was evident that most of the searchers intended to hunt from the river. They left their own canoe and walked across; and at the far end found an Indian family just landing. The sergeant strolled up to them and asked them where they were from.

They told him—from their late-winter camp far to the north and east. They also said they struck the Balsam River three days earlier and had been using it since that time. And they also said that in those three days they had seen nobody but themselves.

"Except," grinned the older man, "a lot of Indians who said they were searching for Newt Hammond's fur."

Bill Nettleton turned to Cockeye. "Hear that? Which seems to rule out any possibility that the fur went far downstream."

"Yeah," said Cockeye. "It leaves two choices — it's either cached handy some place, or it's been flown out by air."

The sergeant then turned and asked the Indians if they had seen or heard any airplanes going south. They had, one. It went over at noon that day.

"Ken Norman," grunted the policeman. "Well, Cockeye, and that eliminates your airplane theory."

They themselves turned up into the bush and for over an hour blundered through the undergrowth. They met others of the search-party, most of whom already disgusted and ready to give it up.

"Two hundred dollars sounded like a pretty fair proposition back there in the store," grinned Cockeye. "But when you get out and start huntin', you sorta figure there's a joker in the deck."

FINALLY they returned to the portage again. The Indian family had already departed; and within a few minutes a dozen of the other Indians were ready to call it a day. Cockeye watched them disappearing up the trail and gave a whimsical smile.

"Chip Dorrance was right. Whoever pinched this fur are long-headed lads."

"And he was so convinced of it," added Bill Nettleton, "that he wouldn't even budge out of the store."

Cockeye nodded. "I know what you're figurin', Bill. The future movements of Mister Dorrance will bear watchin'."

The old-timer turned away, picked out a good flat rock, sat down on it and began to fill his pipe. Watching him, Bill Nettleton began to roll a cigarette.

"It's blame funny to me," growled the policeman at last. "The fur didn't go downstream, it wasn't flown out, and it don't seem to have been cached where half the village can find it."

"Then the only place it could have gone," grunted Cockeye, "is upstream. And that don't make sense. No ten men in the whole wide world could pole up a rapid like this one sounds to be." He bit on his pipe, but his leathery face drew into wrinkles of thought. He was staring at the river flowing swiftly by, at the big eddy near shore that was carrying its floatsam upstream—

He turned suddenly to the sergeant. "It couldn't go upstream, eh? Why not—for a ways? You gotta remember, Bill, that the rapid itself is quite some little piece from here. She comes around a horseshoe bend and the portage cuts across. And if a feller really *wanted* to go upstream till he hit the rapid itself, this eddy sure would help him." He scrambled up, headed for the river and began to follow it upstream.

Bill Nettleton followed him. They made a hundred yards, with the roar of the rapid sounding louder all the time. They noticed, too, that the strength of the eddy was diminishing. It was petering out, its burden of driftwood dispersing and heading out into the current again. Then their progress was blocked by a huge spruce tree that lay uprooted with its head in the rapid. And under the limbs of the spruce and covered by more spruce boughs, was an upturned nineteen-foot freight canoe.

HAD they not been looking closely they would have missed it entirely. The fallen tree, the boughs, all made a perfect camouflage. Then they crawled beneath the branches, lifted the edge of the canoe, and saw beneath it eight bales of fur.

They squatted there together, looking into each others eyes and grinning. Bill Nettleton was the first to speak.

"Well, what d'you know about that? And right under our nose!"

"Yet fairly safe," pointed out Cockeye. "I don't suppose anybody's been up here twice in the last century. And the portage itself is quite a piece off in the bush."

But Bill Nettleton wasn't listening. He was crawling toward the canoe's stern, then bending over the yellow-varnished, right-hand gunnel. Then he turned to Cockeye, and pointed.

On the bottom-side of the gunnel, unnoticed if the canoe had been the right-way

up, was a thick, dried smear of blood. And when Cockeye crawled over and looked closer, he saw something else. In the blood was the imprint of a man's fingers.

He stared for a moment, then looked up at Bill Nettleton.

"I get it, all right. The feller that beefed Johnny-boy—prob'ly by smashin' in his head with a rock—got some blood on his fingers. When he grabbed the canoe to launch it, he transferred the blood to the gunnel." He grinned dryly. "Ain't this what you call your break?"

But instead of answering, Bill Nettleton raised the canoe and held it up by a rock that he found nearby. Under the canoe was Newt Hammond's engine. On the nickeled handle of the steering-arm were more prints.

"I don't know if these are one of the Indian's fingerprints or the prints of the feller that picked up the engine and loaded it into the canoe. But I'll sure find out." He grabbed the steering-arm by its rubber grip, twisted, and took the thing off. "But there's no argument about these other prints here."

He dug out a heavy jackknife, cut crossways of the gunnel on each side of the bloodstained prints, then between them dug in the point of the knife. By prying, he came up with the fingerprints intact.

He looked at his exhibit. "Varnished hardwood like this is just as good as glass. Yeah, Cockney; I can call this the break."

THE trip to Long Portage had paid big dividends; so they returned to their canoe and reached the trading-post soon after six.

Newt Hammond was in the store when the two men walked in on him. He glanced into their grinning faces and wanted to be told what the joke was all about.

"It's a joke," agreed Bill Nettleton. "Only the joke is on those guys who thought they had swiped your fur."

The trader stared from one man to the other.

"You're not tellin' me you found it—you found the fur?"

"There y'are," Cockeye told the policeman. "The feller guessed right first time!"

But Bill Nettleton looked around him and to a couple of Indian kids playing in front of the store.

"Let's go back in the office, Newt," he suggested. "It's more private there." And once they were in the office he went on. "Yes, we found your fur. Only it was in a place where you'd never think of looking for it." He gave Hammond the story of the find, then touched on another matter. "Of course, Newt, you're interested mainly in your fur; but if you're interested in another matter—and I mean the murder of Johnny-boy—well, we've dug up something on that." The sergeant tapped his tunic pocket. "In here, wrapped up in my handkerchief, is a chunk of the gunnel of your canoe. It's got a few bloodstained fingerprints on it. And the prints'll be the prints of the man who beefed Johnny-boy."

Cockeye had been listening to the policeman's recital, but his ears had caught another sound from out in the store. He turned, looked through the connecting doorway, and then nodded to Hammond.

"Someone to see you, Newt."

He was grinning whimsically, and the policeman craned his neck to investigate. The man in the store was Chip Dorrance.

Nettleton frowned. "Go ahead," he ordered Hammond. "See what he wants."

Dorrance's wants seemed to be simple, for Cockeye heard him ask for a pound of tea and a package of lard. But when the man went out and Hammond came into the office again, Nettleton shot him a ques-

tion. "Wonder what brought him in here?"

Hammond frowned. "I don't know—unless it was to buy that stuff."

"But I never heard him come in."

"No," said Cockeye. "He wears moccasins."

Bill Nettleton glowered at the doorway. "Any man who slides around as quietly as that bears watching. If he heard what we were talking about—"

"But maybe he didn't," suggested Hammond. "Or perhaps he'd only just come in."

"Anyway," said the sergeant, "I'm going to move and move quick. And the first thing is to get word out to Ken Norman. I'll have these prints brought out plainly and photographed; and in the meantime I'll fingerprint every man in the place. Every white man and breed," he amended. "And they won't know I'm doing it. I'll have Ken bring in a few bottles of beer, and when a man takes a drink out of one of those bottles, he'll leave his fingerprints behind him."

Cockeye sighed. "Give 'em a drink, then pinch 'em for murder. A nice Judas-like proceedin'. Still, you're a cop, and I suppose it's all in the game."

"I dunno which is the worse," maintained Bill Nettleton. "To butcher a poor Nitchie and steal seven thousand dollars worth of fur, or to use a legitimate means of bringing the butcher to time."

He stood up to go, mentioning to Cockeye that the steering-arm was still in the canoe and had to be brought up. But before they left, Cockeye had a remembrance.

"And how about that little game of poker? Seems like we've all done a good day's work, and I feel like a little recreation."

"Fine with me!" agreed Hammond. "Give me time to clean up my books for the day, wash and eat, and I'll come up to Ginger's.

"Ginger likes a game but can't get away evenin's from his radio. We'll play up there, and Ginger can set in."

So they went out, and after Nettleton had retrieved his other piece of evidence from the canoe, they headed for the radio-station. But the sergeant was more than usually silent. Cockeye noticed it.

"Worried, Bill, about Dorrance overhearin' what you had to say?"

"I dunno whether I am or not. If he heard what I said and was mixed up in this murder, he knows where he's at. He may run out on us."

"Then pinch him!" suggested Cockeye. "Cripes, you're a cop, ain't you?"

"And what'll I pinch him for? For wearin' moccasins, or buying a pound of tea and a package of lard?"

Cockeye fell into humorous silence, and at last they came to the radio-station. In a dozen words or so Bill Nettleton gave the facts to Ginger Mackie, withholding the information regarding the fingerprints. He told Ginger to get in touch with town and have Ken come in at once. "And tell him," he added, "to bring in half a dozen bottles of beer and a fingerprinting outfit from the barracks."

Ginger looked at him curiously. "You mean that, Sergeant?"

"I sure do. And shove that message over the air as soon as you can."

THEY had supper, and afterwards the sergeant borrowed Ginger's typewriter and wrote out a report of the happenings of the day. Typewriting was not Bill's strong point, so two hours elapsed before he had finished. In the meantime Cockeye snoozed on Ginger's cot and Ginger buried himself in a magazine. But when Nettleton stood up and yawned hugely, Cockeye roused.

"Eight o'clock and more!" exclaimed the old-timer. "Half the evenin' gone by and nothin' to show for it." He looked across at Ginger Mackie. "Did someone mention a poker-game, or did I just dream they did?"

"You said Newt Hammond was coming up."

"Sure. Then get the cards out and the table fixed up ready for when he does."

But Newt Hammond did not show up until a quarter to nine, and when he did it was to apologize for his lateness.

"Lefty Horne walked in on me just as I was ready to leave, and I had to waste time chewin' the rag with him."

The sergeant looked up quickly. "Lefty Horne? When did he pull in?"

"He didn't pull in. He walked in."

"Seven miles?"

"About three miles. Lefty has a trail from the fox-farm. It cuts across the point instead of going around it."

"And what did he want?"

"Oh, just a bit of grub; just what he could carry in his packsack. Some sugar and some coffee; but it was probably the ammunition he wanted most—a box of .303s."

Bill Nettleton scrubbed his heavy chin. "I wish I'd known he was here. I wanted to see him."

Newt Hammond grinned lopsidedly. "Yeah; I told him that."

"And what did he say?"

Hammond's grin broadened. "He said if you wanted to see him, you knew where he lived."

Color flooded Bill Nettleton's face. "He said that, did he? A tough guy. Well, I'll see him," he growled. "I'll see him right away."

He began to push back from the table till Cockeye gave a disgusted yelp.

"Aw, sit down! What's the matter with you? All the feller said was that if you wanted to see him you knew where he lived. And what's wrong with that? Me, I'm like Lefty. If I got a second-handed order to report to the police, I'd tell 'em same thing. Anyway," he concluded, "if you've gotta see him, wait till the mornin' and we'll all go along."

Bill Nettleton glared at Cockeye, but he sat down. The game began, and though desultory at first, it speeded up as time went by.

Apparently the sergeant's ill-mood found some outlet in the cards, for he crowded the play savagely at every opportunity.

Ten o'clock came; ten-thirty; then the humming of an outboard motor drew closer and broke off in front of the cabin. Hammond looked up. "Someone pullin' in."

It was Chip Dorrance, who walked into the light and blinked half-blindedly. He grinned around him.

"If I'd known a game was on, I'd arranged to take a hand in it. Why didn't someone tell me?"

Hammond thumbed his cards. "Where you been?"

"Up the river to Twin Falls. My old father-in-law was outa tea and lard. So I took him up that stuff I bought off you this afternoon."

"Too bad Lefty didn't know it," said Hammond. "He was in tonight for a jag of stuff, walkin'. You could have taken it up for him and saved him the trip."

Dorrance nodded. "I figured he was off some place. I stopped off there on my way down and found the shack locked up."

Hammond frowned now. "On your way down? When was that?"

"I dunno. Not much over half an hour ago."

"Half an hour ago!" emphasized Hammond. "It was two hours ago he left here. He should have been home before nine."

Cockeye, listening to this, glanced across the table at Bill Nettleton. The sergeant had missed nothing of what had been said. He glanced at his strap-watch.

"Did Lefty," he asked Hammond, "say where he was going after he left you?"

"No. But he did say that if he stepped out he'd be home and get his chores done before dark."

"And he should have been home by nine at the latest?" The sergeant dropped his cards, looked at Cockeye without seeing him, and began to scrub his chin. "I don't like this," he muttered. "Maybe it's noth-

ing, but—well, I wish, Newt, you hadn't told Lefty I wanted to see him."

"And why not? Lefty didn't have nothin' to worry over."

"Maybe he didn't. But I wanted to see him just the same. And," suddenly, "I think I'll go up and see him now."

Cockeye laughed, and outright Ginger Mackie looked puzzled. But Nettleton turned to Chip Dorrance. How about hiring your canoe?"

"I don't hire my canoe," said the man. "But if you want to use it, you're welcome."

The sergeant nodded. "Thanks. But I don't know the way to Lefty's place. Somebody'll have to guide me."

"I'll do that," volunteered Newt Hammond.

"Or I can," put in Dorrance.

"Finer'n silk!" crowed Cockeye. "What say we all go along!"

THEY started out in the night, the four of them in Chip Dorrance's canoe with the halfbreed running the engine. Dark had long since fallen, but in the northwest the sky was streaked with red. It was chilly, too, so that Cockeye was glad of the heavy sweater Ginger had lent him.

They made four miles, then a light showed on the left-hand bank. Chip Dorrance leaned forward to speak to Nettleton. "Duke Keating's."

A short three miles further brought them to Newt Hammond's fox-farm, and by the light of a powerful electric torch that Chip Dorrance produced, they climbed the bank to a low squat cabin overlooking the river. All saw at once that the door was secured by a length of chain and a padlock.

Newt Hammond was the first to mention it. "Funny all right. Either he never got home, or he got home and went away again."

Nettleton nodded, and tried the padlock; then he took the halfbreed's flashlight and shone it through the window.

"He's been home," he announced. "There's a half-filled packsack sitting on a chair. And," he added grimly, "if Lefty came home and then took off again in such a hurry, I'm sort of curious to cast an eye around inside."

"There's an axe," said Hammond, pointing to the woodpile. "And I guess I can always dig up another lock."

So Nettleton picked up the axe, hit the lock a sharp blow, and the padlock gave. The blow also caused the door to swing open. And Bill Nettleton, preparing to step inside the cabin, pulled up abruptly.

To get in at all he would have to step over the sprawled-out body of a man.

COCKEYE let out a startled yelp; and there was no wonder that he did. For the man on the floor was lying head toward them, with his face half-turned. One arm was outstretched, and a glance at the matted hair and the puddle of blood was explanation enough of what had happened. For if this were Lefty Horne and the sergeant had wanted a talk with Lefty, well, the sergeant had come a little too late.

And it was Lefty. Both Chip Dorrance and Newt Hammond testified to the fact. Nettleton nodded.

"Then all right, boys. Stay where you are till I light the lamp."

He found a gasoline lantern on a shelf, lit it, and stepped carefully over Lefty's body again. "Come in now, if you want to," he told the others. "But don't touch anything till I say so."

Cockeye, however, disobeyed in one particular. "Are you sure the feller's dead?" he asked, and without waiting knelt down and groped for any indication of a heartbeat he could find. "No," he finally said. "No pulse at all."

Nettleton nodded, then turned on Chip Dorrance.

"You said something about being past this cabin tonight. In fact, you said you stopped here. Did you come up to the shack?"

Dorrance shook his head. "No. I come ashore, but when I seen the place was padlocked, I got into the canoe ag'in and kep' on."

"You did, eh?" Nettleton drilled him. "Are you sure of that?"

The halfbreed's sooty eyes hardened. "What d'you mean, 'sure'? I tell you I wasn't nearer to the shack than lookin' at the padlock. And though it was getting dusk, I could see it from where I stood."

Bill Nettleton nodded. "All right. No need to get all burned up." He picked up the packsack from the chair and dumped its contents on the table. There was the sugar, coffee, and two boxes of .303 ammunition. "It looks," he said, "as though Lefty barely got home when he was killed. He put his packsack on the chair, turned, maybe, at a noise at the door, then got it swift and sudden."

After that the sergeant made a tour of the place, extending it even to a search outside. He came in again and nodded to Hammond.

"Think I'll go down and see what Keating has to say. Coming along?" Hammond agreed, and the sergeant spoke to Cockeye. "We won't be gone any great while. And keep an eye on things till I get back."

But with the sound of the motor starting up, Dorrance cast a glance at Lefty Horne and shivered.

"We shoulda gone along, too. Me, I don't care for the company."

"Then set down outside somewheres and look at the stars," was Cockeye's advice.

After a moment the man rolled a cigarette, lit it, and crossed to the doorway.

"Yeah; think I will sit down outside. And," he added, "I won't be far away, neither."

But Cockeye did not seem greatly concerned with Chip Dorrance. He sat down on a chair, filled his pipe and puffed for some moments in silent contemplation. He got up finally, took a cruise around the cabin and poked through the cupboards; then came back and sat on the chair again.

After a while Chip Dorrance reappeared.

"Kinda cold," mentioned the halfbreed. "But if you can stand him, I guess I can."

Now Cockeye became conversational. He discussed the weather, the natives of the district, Newt Hammond's fox-farm itself; but he steered clear of either the fur-theft or the murder of Johnny-boy and the recent slaying of Lefty. And after a while Bill Nettleton returned.

HE CAME tramping up the bank with Newt Hammond and Duke Keating. At the doorway he stood to one side allowing Keating a full view of Lefty Horne. The Englishman stiffened, blinked rapidly, and stared at Cockeye.

"Lefty—?" he managed to say. "Is—is he dead?"

If this was mere acting, thought Cockeye, it was superbly done. He nodded in answer to Keating's question.

"He's dead enough to suit himself."

"And I suppose," broke in Nettleton, "you don't know a thing about it?"

Keating turned, tearing his eyes from the dead man. "Know anything about it? Why, of course I don't."

"U-huh. And as the gink was killed within the last hour or so, I suppose you were in your cabin not three miles from here when it happened?"

"Well, yes; I suppose I was."

"You had nothing to do with it yourself, and you didn't see nor hear anyone else go up or down the river?"

Keating was on the verge of answering, but his answer didn't come.

"Eh?" prodded Nettleton. "You heard me!"

But the Englishman maintained a stubborn silence.

Nettleton stood it for a moment, then he began to bluster. "Okay, boy. If that's the line you want to take, we'll see what we can do." He wheeled on Keating, eyes narrowed. "Are you going to talk, or do I run you in on a murder-rap?"

Cockeye didn't care for this a lot. Bill Nettleton was losing his temper and going a bit too far. Too far with Keating, anyway. Cockeye read Keating as one of these stubborn, prideful Englishmen that knew their rights and resented authority. If Bill went much further with him— And then he caught a glance between Keating and Chip Dorrance.

"Cool down, Bill," he ordered. "He won't talk and we know the answer. He saw somebody go up and down the river today. It was Chip Dorrance."

"There ain't no secret about that!" grinned Chip.

"Then why the devil didn't he say so?" barked Nettleton.

Cockeye shrugged. "Dunno. Only if he *hod* said so, well, it would have sounded worse than mebbe it is."

Nettleton glared at Keating, and Keating seemed to relax. Suddenly, the sergeant nodded to Cockeye. "Come out here a minute. I want to talk to you."

Cockeye obeyed; and out of earshot of the others, Bill Nettleton began to speak.

"That bird knows something. Keating, I mean. And I think both him and the breed are mixed up in this. At least, one of 'em is."

He looked around him, lowered his voice. "The breed admits coming by here twice today. The first time doesn't matter; but he sure came by at the right time on his trip home. The other feller, the Englishman, was around here all the time. You said to look for white men. Well, I got white men—or the next thing to it. But which is the killer? Keating could have killed Lefty, and so could Dorrance."

"But why should either kill him?" asked Cockeye.

"Aw, you ain't that dumb," said Nettleton, testily. "You've got it figured out as well as I have that Lefty was mixed up in this fur-theft and the murder of Johnny-boy. But who killed Lefty? Keating could have killed him to keep the fur for himself; or Dorrance could have killed him to keep his mouth shut about it. Dorrance, you'll remember, overheard me in the store saying that we had those fingerprints."

"Yeah, I see. Boiled down, Lefty was in partnership with one of these ducks in the fur theft. But you don't know which one to pinch."

"That's it; right on the nose."

Cockeye was thoughtful for a moment or two. "You figured that Keating may have killed Lefty so he wouldn't have to split the fur with him when it's peddled off. If that's the idea, it'll come quite a shock to Keating when he learns the fur's been found already and there won't be none to split!"

"Come on in again," said Nettleton suddenly. "This is going to be good!"

INSIDE the cabin, Nettleton confronted the Englishman again.

"When did you leave the village?" he asked him.

"Right after I saw you in the store."

"You did, eh? Then," suggested Nettleton, "you wouldn't know the fur's turned up? Newt's seven thousand dollars worth, I mean."

Keating stared at him for a moment. "Found?" he exclaimed. "Who found it?"

"We did, of course."

Again Keating stared, and a thin smile came to his lips. "Then I must congratulate you, if you don't mind."

"Oh, he don't mind," grinned Cockeye. "I thought it was rather smart myself."

At that, Bill Nettleton's restraint seemed to snap.

"Okay, feller; you're coming into the settlement with me. I won't say I'm arresting you, but the chances are I will."

"Arresting me for what?" Keating's eyes seemed to blaze.

"That's something to be figured out," snapped the sergeant. "Probably for knowing too little about Newt Hammond's fur."

Keating looked around him. Cockeye expected him to blow up; but instead another cold smile came to his lips.

"Very well, Sergeant. After all, you're only doing your job."

Bill Nettleton's jaws tightened, and he looked at Cockeye.

"Grab that blanket off the bunk. We'll roll Lefty into it, and haul him down to the canoe. You, Dorrance and Newt, lend a hand."

They spread the blanket and rolled Lefty Horne onto it and carried him down the shore.

Bill Nettleton's show of heat seemed to pass. He went back up to the cabin, suggesting to Hammond that he come along.

"Looks like you got to hire another man in Lefty's place," he told the trader. "In the meantime, d'you think things'll be all right?"

"I'll send a Nitchie up in the morning," replied Hammond.

They picked up Lefty's packsack for evidence, turned out the light and fastened the door as best they could.

"I'll be coming up again myself in the morning," remarked Nettleton. "We may find something in the daylight that we can overlook at night. And that man Keating interests me a lot."

But Hammond could not share the sergeant's view. "Keating? No. Not me. I'd just as soon suspect — well, Ginger Mackie as him."

With the cabin-door secured, they joined the others. Forty minutes of fast downstream travel brought them to the settlement again. Newt Hammond suggested that for want of a better place, Lefty's body could be stored in one of his warehouses. While the others saw to this, Cockeye turned away, saying he was tired and that bed looked good to him.

But when Bill Nettleton returned at last to the radio-station, it was to find the old-timer very much wide awake. He and Ginger were at the transmitter, Ginger with headphones clamped to his ears. But just as the sergeant entered, Ginger shut off the power.

A suspicious light came into Bill Nettleton's eyes. "What are you bums up to?" he asked. "If it's about this latest murder, you could have asked me first. I don't want to be worried to death by orders from town—"

"You won't be worried," Cockeye told him placidly. "I'm just tryin' to save you from bein' worried at all."

The sergeant, spread-legged and with his thumbs in his belt, glared down at Cockeye. The suspicious light in his eyes deepened.

"You ain't," he suggested, "holdin' out on me?"

"Holdin' out on you?" Cockeye's tone was shocked. "Why, Bill, how could you ever say that? That idea of yourn of goin' up to hunt Lefty tonight was pure headwork. When Chip said about the shack bein' locked, it didn't mean a thing to me at all. But you, now—well; goin' up when we did, that alters the whole complexion of the matter. The body was found immedjut, and nobody had a chance to run away."

For a moment, Bill Nettleton appeared mollified; but that look of grudging suspicion returned.

"But I still think you're holding out on me. You're long-headed and—as I told you—a better detective than a lot of working dicks think they are. Do you," he asked flatly, "know anything about this case that I don't?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Cockeye, "but mebbe I'm guessin' a lot more. And now," he said, standing up, "I'm goin' to

bed. Dang it, these late hours raise hob with my health."

BUT before breakfast was concluded the next morning, town was calling Ginger Mackie. Bill Nettleton, who had been skirmishing with Cockeye ever since they had risen, looked up sharply from his plate as Ginger moved to the set.

He saw Ginger turn gadgets and dials, clamp the headphones tighter to his ears and then reach for a piece of paper. He scribbled for a moment, did more things with the dials, then came over with a grin and the piece of paper. He handed the paper to Cockeye, who took it, squinted and read it, then shoved it under his plate.

"Nothing for me, I suppose," said Nettleton, angrily.

"For me," answered Cockeye. "But eat, and I'll tell you about it after a while."

But almost at once there came the booming of a plane out of the south. Through the window they watched it come on, bank over the station, land and come taxiing shorewards.

"Ken," observed Cockeye. "With your fingerprinting outfit and, mebbe, the beer."

But Ken brought more than this. Out of the cabin of the Lockheed stepped a man in a dark-blue uniform, a gilded cap, and with a string of ribbons across his chest. Nettleton saw him, and his jaw dropped.

"The Old Man!" he blurted. "Johnson, himself!" And then, groaning, he added, "And me with a couple of murders to explain!"

Cockeye thought fast. He yanked the paper from beneath his plate, shoved it at Nettleton and, as Major Johnson began to walk toward the radio-station, talked against time.

Nettleton, bog-eyed, tried to grasp what the old man was saying.

"Yeah, but look here—"

"Look here nothing!" snapped Cockeye. "Get it straight, before the Old Man walks in. It's like this again—"

Then Superintendent Johnson was at the door.

Bill Nettleton pulled himself together. He stood stiffly as the O.C. walked in, and until the O.C. told him to be at ease.

The grand man looked around him, smiled, with a touch of acid.

"I hear, Sergeant, that now you have *two* murder-cases as well as a fur theft on your hands. What are you doing about them?"

"Quite a lot, sir," answered Nettleton. "If Ken has brought the fingerprinting outfit along, I'll be using that first. I think I will find that the prints on Hammond's canoe are Lefty Horne's own, and that will prove that Lefty Horne was murdered in case he weakened and told the whole story." And then Bill Nettleton added, "I take it, sir, you know all about the murder of this man Horne."

"Yes, indeed," said the Old Man. "We received Mr. Mackie's message last night."

"And, of course, Hammond is the man I have to arrest. I have just received confirmation of the fact that Hammond has scarcely any interest left in his business at all.

"He's so deeply mortgaged to a trust company out in town that he was to be foreclosed this summer."

The O.C.'s brows went up. "Then the theft—?"

"Was engineered by Hammond himself, sir. He had this man of his, Horne, to carry out the rough-stuff, but unfortunately—er—we found his fur." Bill Nettleton hesitated for a moment, then went on. "Unfortunately, too, sir, I happened to mention to him that the fingerprints had been found on his canoe, and he knew, then, that ultimately we would be arresting Horne. So yesterday afternoon, while I was typing out a report on the happening and having supper, he sneaked across the bush-trail to Horne's place and murdered him in case he talked. Had he talked, Hammond himself would have been involved in the murder of Johnny-boy."

The O.C. nodded his understanding. "So the second murder was just a simple sequel to the first."

"Not too simple, sir," pointed out Nettleton. "Hammond almost fooled us. He took certain provisions across to Horne's camp in the afternoon when he killed him, then told us later in the evening that Lefty Horne had just left with these. When we discovered Horne dead and saw the provisions in his packsack, we naturally concluded that Hammond's story was correct —that Horne had been murdered immediately after he reached home."

"I see. I don't exactly follow you," admitted the superintendent, "but that can come after a while. The immediate thing, though, is to fingerprint Horne, then arrest Hammond."

"Yes, sir," said Bill Nettleton unblushingly. "And I was just getting ready to do that when you arrived."

"Then let us go."

They went out, the two of them. Ken Norman, who had been in time to hear the story, said something about smart work on the part of Bill Nettleton; but Ginger Mackie hooted.

"Smart work on Cockeye's part! If it hadn't been for him, Bill would have missed by a mile."

"Oh no he wouldn't," demurred Cockeye. "He'd have got around to it in time. I give him a short-cut, mebbe; but that's all."

Ken thought he'd go down and get in on the fun; so did Ginger Mackie. But Cockeye preferred to stay and finish his breakfast.

After a while, however, two men returned. They were Bill Nettleton and Ken Norman. Ken headed for his ship, Nettleton for the radio-station.

The sergeant walked in, with a tough smile on his face. As well as the smile he wore a smear of blood. Cockeye observed it.

"He put up a scrap, eh?"

"Why not?" countered Nettleton. "But Ken's going to swing in there, and we'll load him for town."

HE STOOD in the middle of the floor for a moment, looking down at Cockeye. Cockeye, however, was industriously pouring himself a cup of cold coffee. But Bill Nettleton spoke at last.

"Thanks a million, old-timer, for what you did."

Cockeye looked up. "For what I did? I never pinched the feller."

"You know what I mean. But tell me," said Bill Nettleton with great humility, "how came you to pick on Hammond?"

"Well," Cockeye deliberated, "up at the fox-farm. When we found Lefty Horne."

"Go on," prompted the sergeant.

"Remember me askin' if the feller was really dead and kneelin' down beside him and feelin' his pulse? It was luck, Bill; just plumb luck. When I felt his pulse he seemed awful danged chilly for a guy who'd only been dead about an hour."

"I missed that," admitted Nettleton.

"Sure. Like I say, I was lucky. And havin' that to go on, I found somethin' else. Figurin' that Hammond had killed him, Lefty couldn't have been into the post when Hammond said he was. There was the sugar and the coffee and the shells in Lefty's packsack, but—pokin' into the cupboards I found Lefty had coffee and sugar enough to last him another three weeks. That's where Hammond slipped. No man would pack that stuff in, walkin', if he had lots of it. It didn't make sense. And I suppose it would have occurred to Hammond after a while and he'd have taken a look around to see how Lefty was fixed for these lines. But he forgot it at first, and later, he never had the chance."

The motor on the plane was roaring. Bill Nettleton turned to go.

"Anyway," he confessed, "I'm glad it wasn't Chip or Keating. I may have been tough on Keating, but somehow, he seemed like a good lad to me."

"Just so good," pointed out Cockeye,

"that he wouldn't squeal on who the guy was who went up and down the river. It put him in a tough spot, but he'd put himself there rather than squeal on a friend. And as the lad ain't got much to do, I think I'll take him over to the camp to visit with me a spell. I took a real shine to him."

Bill Nettleton threw an anxious glance through the window.

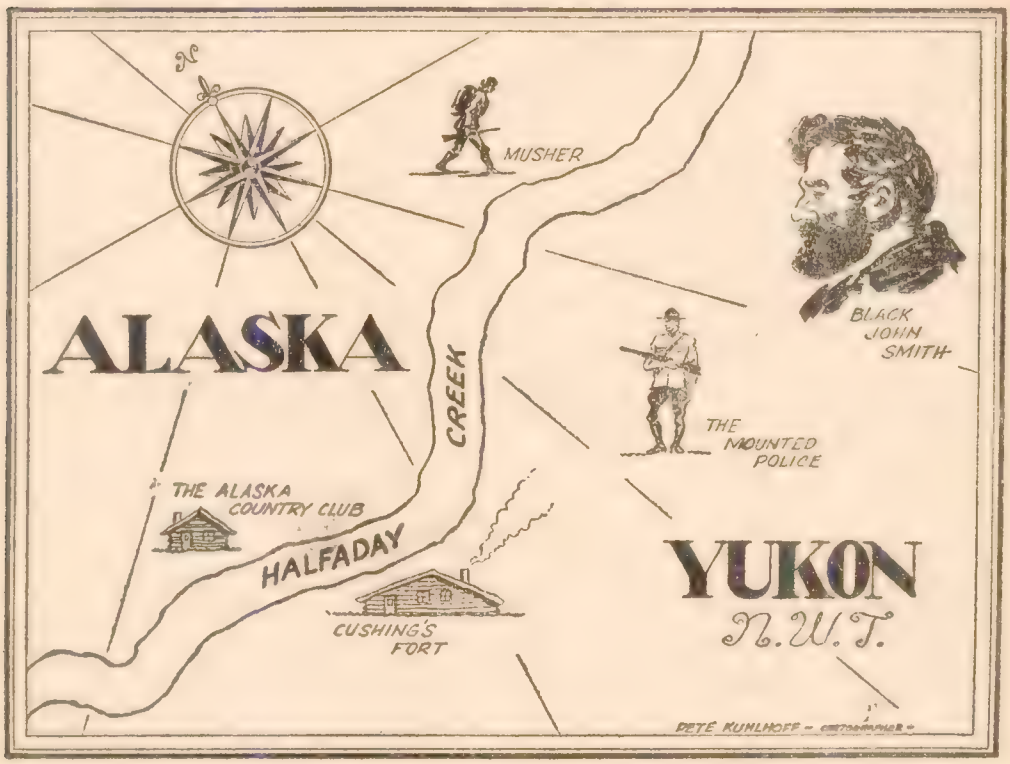
"I've got to be going; but we'll be in soon to take you home." He put out a hand and shook Cockeye's crushingly. "I owe you a lot, old-timer. More than I'll ever repay."

"*You* owe me!" grinned Cockeye. "You don't owe me nothin'! I'm more concerned over Newt Hammond—and what *he* owes me. And now," sorrowfully, "I don't suppose I'll ever collect."

"Newt Hammond? What does he owe you?"

Cockeye's grin broadened. "Two hundred simoleons—for findin' them bales o' fur!"

Black John Smith always announced that he would neither help nor hinder the Police. But on occasion it looked as if he were doing both at the same time. To the bewilderment of both the crooks and Corporal Downey!



Evil Companions

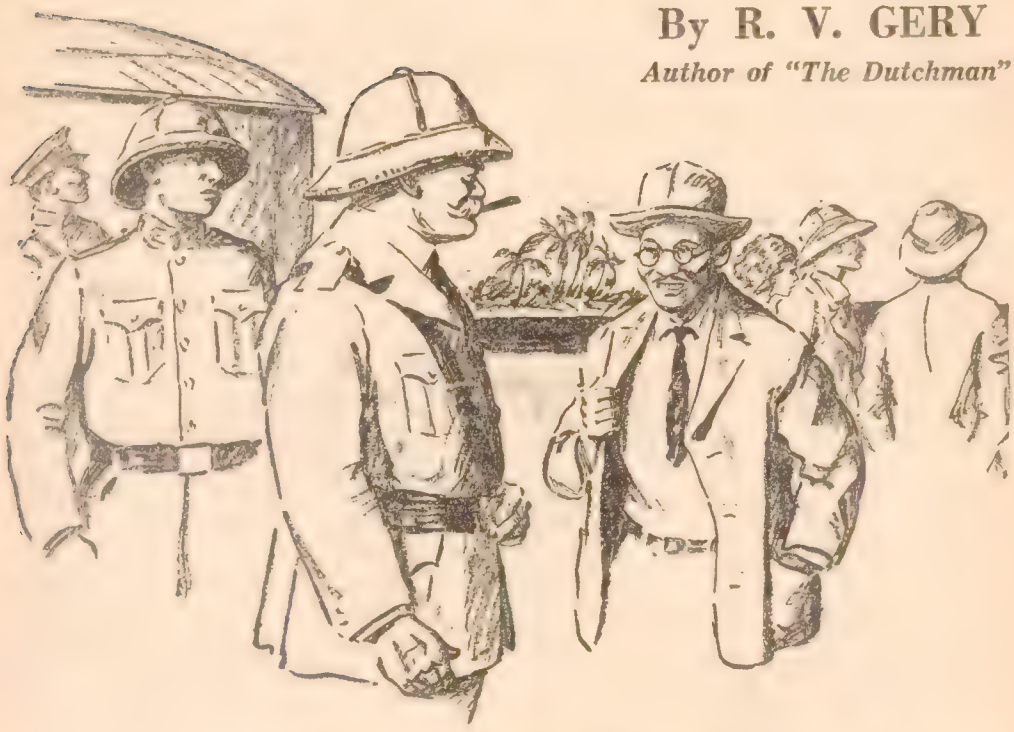
By JAMES B. HENDRYX

in the next SHORT STORIES

THE DUTCHMAN AND

By R. V. GERY

Author of "The Dutchman"



I

WHEN Makassar's Kappie De Vries wedded Micaela Van Rhyn, he being then forty-six and she a scant nineteen, there was a prodigious amount of sniffing and head-wagging around and about in the old Dutch-colonial town.

They said, the fat old boys on the club verandah, that Kappie was a baby-snatching old crocodile, a so-and-so who ought to know better, and that Micaela was due to rue the day. Like a bunch of *aasvogels* hovering over carrion, they sipped their pink gins and recalled episodes; episodes of Kappie's bachelor past which quite naturally lost nothing at all in the telling.

Moreover, there was more than a grain of truth in some of those entertaining stories, for Kappie De Vries had always had a way with women. He was one of those big-built, powerful, scowling males who seem to knock 'em dead from all angles; and if he had besides a strong tinge of the love-'em-and-leave-'em in him, why, all the more spice to him, said the plump *mevrouws* and peony-like damsels of the official set. The husbands and fathers of the ladies aforesaid may have held slightly different views on the gallant inspector, and kept a tightish hold on things while he was around. But everyone of them would have agreed instantly that even if Kappie did happen to be hell on wheels among the petticoats, he was also a chief of police without peer, and a very-damned fine fellow to boot.

So that when he fell for Micaela's dark charms and took to domesticity and that little bungalow up the side-street—when, moreover, in due course Micaela presented him with a bouncing young Dutchman the size of a house, the talk died away. Now and again one of the gossips aforesaid, seeing Micaela pass, graceful with young Piet in the baby-cart, might growl something

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Blackmailing a Government Under the Very Nose of that Very Damned Policeman Kappie—That Was Big Business All Right

under his breath; but on the whole it was the consensus of public opinion that Kappie had put his early filibusterings and conquests behind him and gone virtuous. A sad let-down, muttered some of the pink-ginners, but what would you? Marriage did that kind of thing to a man, not so?

NEVERTHELESS, there was one time, in the second year of Piet's young life, that Kappie raised most particular Ned—gave them all something to talk about, a scandal of the very juiciest, to rock the wise-guys back and forwards in their chairs, and have every woman in town save one—going around with hard eyes and mouths that looked as if they had just made acquaintance with bitter aloes, quinine, and a whole barrelful of dill pickles.

Like a great many other of Kappie's affairs, it was on the colossal scale—a bear-cat; and what is more, it made Kappie out to be a libertine, a heartless trifler with the affections of a very lovely lady, a betrayer of the sanctities of married life, and nine kinds of a fool as well. Not one of which Kappie was, and least of all a fool.

It began somehow as follows. Kappie was down at the airport one day, stiff and competent in uniform, and with Sergeant Jan and a brace of stout constables at his heels. He was awaiting the arrival of the K.L.M. liner from Batavia, the capital, and an official gentleman thereon—a gentleman who carried with him in a portfolio certain official papers of vast importance, and strapped around his middle in a leather wallet, certain others that were pure, unmitigated dynamite.

Events in the past months, both east and west of the Indies, had done nothing to diminish their rapidly-growing strategic importance. West, Europe was one magnificent case of the jitters, with values and policies shifting every hour and rival groups glaring at each other like embattled tomcats on a fence. East, the long ten-

tacles of another power had come snaking down the China coast, menacing all the fabulous islands of the Dutchmen's rule. And people were doing things about that, big and important people, meeting here and there about the Indies to see what came next in this gigantic poker-game whose stakes were whole continents.

There was just such a meeting on, here in Makassar, and the man in the plane was part of it. Another part was up in town there at the hotel, a quiet-spoken French civilian; another out there in the harbor, with admiral's insignia on his uniform and Old Glory floating above him. And their discussions were urgent, special, and treble-starred secret—which is why, to be sure, Kappie De Vries could see a neat and bespectacled little party there in the crowd watching for the plane. The party's name was Yoshimoto Ikeda, and he was something undefined around the Japanese consulate.

Also, he was a remarkably pleasant little fellow—and pure poison. Kappie knew a whole lot about him and wished heartily he knew more.

Ikeda saw him and grinned. He strolled over, looking like a neat doll in his immaculately cut silk suit and Panama.

"Ah?" he said, holding out a brown hand. "He is arriving, eh? So very nice, Kappie—these Englishmen all are. I trust the meeting will be nice, too. It is pleasant to see them come together—English gentlemen, French gentlemen, American gentlemen around a table."

YOU had to hand it to these polite little scamps, Kappie reflected. They would cut your throat with the manners of a Chesterfield, and condemn you, or themselves, to a death of agony with a smile and a wave of the hand.

"*Ja,* Ikeda," he said with a twinkle. "He is coming, I hope — this Sir Reginald Butterworth (Almighty, these English names!) And you, my friend? You are also expecting a visitor, eh? Or do you take a walk, maybe, for a little air and exercise?"

Elaborate banter, the airy refinements of two antagonists about to engage with the bare steel. Ikeda knew it, every bit as well as Kappie did, but he played up.

"Me?" he said, still with his engaging smile. "No, I expect no one, Kappie. Pure curiosity, that is all. But maybe you do not think it is nice to be curious—"

Kappie chuckled, and turned as the hum of the plane's engines became audible and it hove in sight to westward.

"I think it is very nice, Ikeda," he said. "As long as you are a little careful. Just a little, my friend—that is all!"

He strode across to the tarmac, leaving Ikeda where he was. There was a queer intent expression on the Jap's intelligent face, and he stood waiting until the last of the plane's passengers had descended. Then without another word he threaded his way through the crowd and made toward the city. Apparently his curiosity, pure or otherwise, was satisfied, because he did not so much as look back, or give the celebrated Sir Reginald a tumble.

THAT personage was standing talking to Kappie. He was a pretty typical product of his country, a beefy-faced, wide-shouldered man in middle age, and on his looks alone he might have been set down for a slowcoach. Unfortunately for that theory, he was a Whitehall civil servant and a career diplomat, and Whitehall does not award knighthoods to those slow on the uptake. Sir Reginald was a very

distinguished gentleman indeed in his line, which was defense-problems, and nobody in the world understood that better than Mr. Ikeda of the Japanese Foreign Office.

They employ a lot of applied psychology in that department, and Ikeda knew what he knew about Sir Reginald. He knew, for instance, that the big man came from a stiff-necked and pertinacious breed—the sort to whom danger is a matter to be ignored rather than handled prudently. They have been getting away with that attitude for a long while now, these people. It is a species of bluff and highly effective, mostly; but Mr. Ikeda figured in his quick little mind that the stakes were down, the pot sweetened, and it was just about time to call the hand.

Sir Reginald and Kappie moved toward the car in friendly conversation. The Englishman was protesting amiably about Jan and the obtrusively armed constables.

"Unnecessary, m'dear fellow, I assure you," he was saying. "I've never been hurt yet. However, I suppose it's orders and all that."

"Orders, Mynheer," agreed Kappie soberly. "They are queer times, these. I am to be responsible for your—um, personal safety while you are with us."

"Much obliged, I'm sure—" Sir Reginald was smiling, when someone touched Kappie on the shoulder. He turned round.

"Mynheer?" he said. "You required me? I am busy at this moment—"

The newcomer was another of the plane's passengers—a stout, genial fellow in a sack suit. He held a letter in his hand and beamed at Kappie.

"Inspector De Vries?" he said. "Mighty sorry to worry you, sir, but I've an introduction I'd like to present. Name's Entwhistle—traveling with the wife—your second secretary up to Batavia wrote a line——"

Kappie De Vries had a way with him, when it came to interrupters. He drew himself up and looked down on Entwhistle in a manner Sergeant Jan at least had cause to recognize.

"Mynheer—" he began dangerously.

And then he stopped. Stopped and stared, and so did that phlegmatic party, Sir Reginald Butterworth. They had both of them seen the same vision at the same time, and as Kappie observed later on, fervently, it took the very-damned breath out of their mouths. Mrs. Entwhistle was standing just behind her husband.

Now Kappie was an experienced hand with womankind, as has been inferred, and if appearances went for anything, the red-faced Britisher would have encountered a face or two in his time. But this one was certainly something different—very different. She might have been thirty—or forty—or twenty, for that matter; she had that ageless, unwearying loveliness you see sometimes in an ancient statue freshly disinterred from its sleep. Cool gray eyes, fair hair, a mouth like a benediction; and intelligence and wit and just the amount of slow, reluctant admiration two big, conceited he-creatures could best absorb.

Kappie saluted, nearly knocking off his helmet in the process. He took the letter, with a word of apology to Sir Reginald, glanced it over and handed it back with a beaming smile.

"Mynheer," he said, "I am pleased to meet you. At this moment I am a little occupied, as I said; but later, I shall present myself at the hotel, and see that you are properly welcomed here in Makassar.

Entwhistle said "Delighted!" and his lady smiled, Kappie and Sir Reginald, with somewhat dazed salutations, proceeded to the police car and drove off. As they went the Englishman was moved to comment highly foreign to his nature.

"Gad!" he observed. "That's a beauty. Who is she, Inspector?"

Kappie was still thoughtful. "The husband is an American," he said. "From Fort Worth, Texas. As to his wife, I do not know, Mynheer; American too, maybe. But she is certainly as you say—

a beauty. There is no doubt about that."

He fell silent, having delivered himself of only one correct statement in his last speech. Because Mr. Horatio Entwhistle did not hail from Fort Worth, Texas, was not an American; and the lady was not his wife, nor was she an American either. She was certainly a beauty, however—a beauty in every sense of that most significant word.

II

SIR REGINALD BUTTERWORTH, K.B.E., Vice Admiral Charles Eustace Prentiss, U.S.N., and Monsieur Paul Aristide De Brissac of the Quai D'Orsay held conversations.

They held them in a private room of the century-old fort which is Makassar's official headquarters, with a monstrous amount of fixed-bayonets, locked doors, and general humbug surrounding them, and a considerable sense of their own importance. True, they were important, these worthies, and their discussions ranged over subjects that might well make history. Butterworth had brought down with him from Singapore certain proposals, put forward by very high British authorities indeed—proposals that any one of the bright-eyed, brown little men up the street there, or in Tokyo either, were quite prepared to do anything to see.

But the trouble with this Butterworth was that he was more than a trifle pigheaded about some things, whatever he might be as a negotiator in others. He obstinately refused to admit that there was any danger to himself or the papers he carried; but on the other hand he was equally adamant about allowing them to leave his person. They offered him a safe guarantee against explosives or any other monkey-work; the Makassar authorities, headed by Kappie himself, almost tore their hair trying to persuade him. But Sir Reginald shook his head and went on his way, festooned around his capacious middle with documents worth a great deal more than a mere king's ransom.

"Fiddlesticks!" he observed in his best stuffed-shirt manner. "I'll look after 'em, don't you worry. Don't trust anybody else's safes—"

Kappie swore, and let it go at that. There was really nothing else to do. Short of committing assault on Sir Reginald, that was, and Kappie had a certain hesitancy about doing that. He remembered, however, that there was one Mr. Ikeda navigating around, and several other bright boys of his kidney at the Japanese consulate; so he took precautions.

AND that, too, was no easy matter, for Sir Reginald Butterworth seemed to have flung aside the years and developed a positively boyish crush on the lovely Mrs. Entwhistle. In the hotel, and after office hours as it were, he and the engaging American couple were almost inseparable. Kappie grinned, like everyone else, and made his excuses; she was beyond question enough to disturb anyone. Even Micaela said so on meeting her.

"I am surprised at you," she told her husband. "I had heard—never mind where, Mynheer—that you and a pretty woman—*Na, na,* Kappie, enough! Enough, do you hear, or I scream!"

"Scream, then!" said Kappie, and turned her over his mighty knee. "But talk thus again, and almighty, you have something to scream for, little *schellum!*"

They were in the shaded stoep of their own house, and it was nearly midnight on the third day of Sir Reginald's visit. Kappie set Micaela down with a grin and mixed himself a nightcap.

"Ja," he said. "Undoubtedly there were times, I do not deny it, when I might have looked sideways at that one. She is beautiful — too beautiful, maybe. And that dumbheaded Englishman is making a spectacle of himself."

"He is a man, Mynheer," said Micaela with a twinkle, and Kappie snorted.

"He is a very-damned fool," he returned. "The sooner he is out of this the better."

And then the phone rang. Kappie glanced at his wife, and went over to it. He listened for a moment, said "Ah?" in a voice totally devoid of expression, and replaced the receiver.

"Micaela," he said in an awed voice, "forget what I said then, I beseech you. It was too much like a wish—and the wish comes true. Butterworth," he gulped, "Butterworth——"

He snatched up his helmet, and without further words fled out of the house.

He might well, for things had been happening to Sir Reginald Butterworth, civil servant. A Malay bell-boy, taking him a late-arrived cablegram, had knocked at his door, got no answer, knocked again, and walked in. Next second he had come tumbling down the stairs, gibbering incoherently and pointing. The manager had bolted up, three steps at a time—and had forthwith wished himself elsewhere.

The big Englishman lay spreadeagled in the middle of the floor, a pool of blood slowly welling into the matting rug. By his side, with the electrics coldly gleaming on it, was a foot-long, brass-handled Malay kreese, its broad flame-shaped blade crimson. Sir Reginald was dead, as dead as Dennis, and there was no getting away from that very unpleasant piece of actuality. The window was open—and so were the mouths of the manager, his assistant, and half a dozen trembling, shivering servants.

KAPPIE took charge in his usual brusque, matter-of-fact manner, although he was very pale. He turned everyone out of the room except the manager, and then knelt at Sir Reginald's side. A moment told him what he wanted to know, and his hard mouth tightened into a thin line. He stood upright, glancing around him, until his eye fell on the kreese. He paused, blinking.

"So?" he said, and that was all. He left it lying where it was and on the room telephone got Jan from headquarters. While the sergeant was burning the pavements toward him, Kappie interrogated

the manager. He got something from him, but not much.

Sir Reginald, it would seem, had last been seen about an hour ago, sitting in the lobby, talking.

"Who with?" Kappie snapped, knowing the answer. The manager supplied it—the Entwhistles, husband and wife. Just previously, after dinner, the three had gone for a motor-drive in a hotel car, out along the sea road. And about ten o'clock, said the manager, they had all retired.

"All?" said Kappie. "You are sure, eh?"

The manager nodded. "I saw them ascend the stairs myself, Mynheer Inspector."

There was a knock at the door, and Kappie opened it to Sergeant Jan. The noncom took in the little scene with no more than a slight start, and looked to his superior for instructions. Kappie had them ready.

"Now," he said, "this is the devil, Jan—the devil red-hot from hell. This poor idiot had papers," he threw up his hands—"well, you know the kind of papers. On him—around his waist. They are not there now. That is all."

Jan stood somberly looking down at the corpse. His heavy, stupid face was quite expressionless, which meant that he was thinking very hard indeed. His boiled-gooseberry eye flicked over the kreese and returned to it—went to the window, and

came back to the kreese again. He shot a quick, puzzled glance at Kappie, and in his turn went down on his knees. It was a full half-minute before he rose.

"Well?" said Kappie. "You have noticed, eh?"

Jan signified assent. *"Ja,* Mynheer," he said slowly. "I have noticed. But I do not yet understand—"

Kappie managed a rueful grin at his subordinate's evident bemusement. "You are not alone there, my friend," he said. "What kind of a *vervloekt* business is this—to kill a man and then leave by him a thing that cannot possibly have done the work. It is crazy, Jan; that wound is three times too small for the kreese—"

They looked at one another, chief and underling, as they had looked at one another many a time before, and then Kappie shrugged.

"Very good," he said. "Puzzle number one, Jan. We return to it later. Now for puzzle number two—who did it?"

JAN raised his almost non-existent eyebrows in a kind of resigned apathy, as if the question did not need answering.

Kappie rubbed his chin. *"Ja,"* he said thoughtfully. *"Ja,* I wonder. I wonder——"

Jan stared at him, with such a comic look of surprise that Kappie laughed, even in those surroundings.

"Oh, I know, I know," he observed. "It is *them,* to be sure, finally, Jan. Not a doubt of that, although they will deny it, naturally, until they are black in the face. But who did—this? It does not look like them, almighty! They do not make mistakes, those little devils—"

He remained motionless for a moment, deep in meditation. Then he shrugged.

"Well, we leave that, too, for the moment," he said. "Now we have to explain how it is that we permit important gentlemen in our charge to be—um, assassinated. And that, my friend," he pulled a rueful grimace, "is going to be what our Yankee boys call a son-of-a-gun, eh? I can imagine Batavia's remarks—*ja,* and London, too. Jan, do you see to all this," he waved a hand at the body on the floor. "I must go out and prepare myself to be sacrificed again, it seems!"

He turned the key in the lock and went out into the passage. There was already a constable standing guard over the door—Jan knew his business—and the place was deserted, by all appearances. But as Kappie came out, a figure rose from a deep wicker chair at the end and hastened toward him. It was Entwhistle, and he was in a tremendous taking.

"My godfrey, Inspector," he stammered, "what's all this? I heard—they were saying somebody's got at Sir Reginald—"

Kappie regarded him bleakly. "You will hear all manner of curious things, Mynheer," he said with some asperity, "if you listen long enough. But this time, unfortunately, it is a fact. There has been a most regrettable occurrence. I understand you and your wife passed the evening with the—the unlucky gentleman. That is so, eh?"

Entwhistle nodded. "Didn't leave him till bedtime," he said. "He went off a bit early—said he was tired—and I'd letters to write in our room. Alice is asleep."

Kappie tapped him on the shoulder. "Then keep her so," he enjoined. "Keep her so, Mynheer—there is no sense, *wat drommel!* in disturbing her with unpleasant matters such as this. Tomorrow I shall have to ask you some routine questions, no doubt; but tonight I have other affairs to concern me, as you may imagine. You will hold yourself in readiness, eh, Mynheer—you and your so-charming wife?"

Entwhistle assented, with a ready "Anything at all, Inspector," and Kappie strode off down the stairs. He was grave and preoccupied—and that is why he did not see, behind him, the remarkable expression

on the face of Mr. Horatio Entwhistle as he returned to his suite.

Mr. Entwhistle, it would appear, was also thinking—thinking hard.

III

THERE were plenty of other people in Makassar who had to do that in the next twenty-four hours.

It was perfectly impossible, in the nature of things, to keep the murder hushed up. As Kappie remarked in a sour aside to Jan, that was the worst of killings in very-damned hotels—you had fifty long tongues on the gabble at once. By three in the morning the press had it; by six it was all over Makassar; and by noon it was front-page news, with streamer headings, from Sydney to Sauk Center and back again.

Kappie, in his severely practical office, spent a lurid hour on the long-distance phone to Batavia, where the Governor of the Indies was catching hell from the Netherlands Government and duly passing it on. He was sweating profusely and slightly wild of eye when he laid the instrument down.

"*Ja,*" he said, mopping his brow. "And for once the old boy is in the right. We do not have—how do they say?—a leg to stand on, Jan. Not so, eh?"

The sergeant had come in and was standing to attention by the desk in his usual blockish manner. He had been employed in some delicate monkeying with powder and magnifying-glass, and he held the kreese in his hand.

"Mynheer," he said, "nothing. Either gloves were used, or it has been wiped. I think gloves, myself."

Kappie switched his attention from the general situation to the thing on the desk before him. He knew Jan's bloodhound persistence in matters such as these, his utter refusal to leave the main trail.

"*Ja,*" he said after a moment. "That is probably true, Jan. You have anything else on this thing?"

Jan saluted. "Mynheer," he said, "it is, you observe, not a regular native knife. A curio, only—bought in the bazaar, maybe, a toy. Manufactured, it is very likely, in Japan, for the trade."

Kappie examined the exhibit with moody interest. "Japan, eh?" he commented. "Well, there is nothing more likely than that, as you say. Japan has had a hand in this, to be sure; but still I do not entirely understand; it is not like them to bungle. Wait a moment; let us see what the doctor has to say."

HE REACHED for the telephone and called the official medico who was investigating the details of Sir Reginald's demise. After a brief and grisly conversation he turned to Jan again.

"It was done, he says," he observed, "with a long, thin weapon, from behind. The kreese is impossible, as we imagined. And where do we get from there?"

They got nowhere, it seemed, and Kappie ended by taking his helmet and proceeding to the hotel. He found Entwhistle and his wife awaiting him in their room, and he was still the old Kappie enough to observe that Alice Entwhistle looked lovelier than ever for the touch of pallor and distress she showed.

"It's awful—terrible, Inspector," she said in her low, musical voice. "And to think that Horry and I were talking to him right up to the minute, almost."

Kappie smiled, in spite of himself. "There, there!" he said, in his best consoling manner. "You must not let this affect you, Madame. It is unfortunate, yes, tragic; but it is no concern of yours, surely. And I have nothing but a few quite simple questions to put to you."

He put them, made some notes, and rose. "I thank you," he said formally. "There will be an inquiry—tomorrow, it is probable—but I do not see why you should be required to appear. You are continuing your journey, no doubt?"

Entwhistle shook his head, however

"I'd like to—after this," he said. "But I've some business affairs over in the States to be attended to, and that means, I'm afraid, staying put for a while here. So if you want us——"

Kappie bowed. "I shall call upon you," he said. "At any rate, do not let the matter worry you, I beg. And if you are free go look up my wife. She will be glad to see you, and I," he pulled his woeful little grimace again, "am liable to be—busy!"

He took his leave, and as the door shut behind him the pair in the room looked at one another and relaxed. Entwhistle's round, jovial face was wreathed in smiles, and he executed a tiny, silent double-shuffle on the carpeted floor.

"And there goes," he said, "the most dangerous policeman in the East—"

The lady was looking thoughtfully out of the window.

"Leave him alone," she said. "We've other things to worry about just now. You've heard from——?"

She left the query unfinished, but Entwhistle took her point.

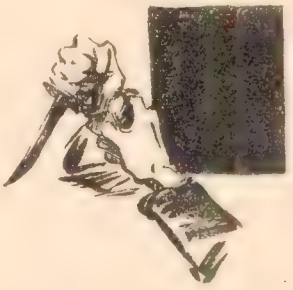
"Not yet," he said. "But don't you lose any sleep about it. I'll handle that lot all right. They'll squawk blue murder, sure enough—but I've got 'em where I want 'em, and they'll pay. I'm not scared of 'em!"

The lady permitted her devastating mouth to twitch into a smile.

"You're a bad little man, Tony," she said with a trace of mockery. "I've heard of some funny things in my time, but blackmailing a government's the best yet."

Entwhistle—or Tony Le Grand, to use another of his names—went into a silent chuckle. "Blackmail be damned!" he said. "It's business, just business. Ikeda knows that—he's not anybody's idiot!"

MR. IKEDA of the Japanese Foreign Office may have been just as Entwhistle described him, but at that moment he was a trifle disturbed inwardly. He was talking to Kappie De Vries, as a matter of fact, on the sidewalk there in the Leidenstraat, and there was that in Kappie's manner that told him plenty.



"Ja," the Dutchman was saying with a solemn wag of the head, "it is a nasty affair, Ikeda—is it not? A so-eminent public servant, and of another government too, murdered on our doorstep, as a man might say. You are deeply shocked, I am certain."

Ikeda's brilliant smile was absent for once. "Very, very terrible," he murmured. "In the present state of things, very difficult for everybody. You have no idea, I suppose, who the culprits may be?"

Kappie looked at him—looked at him woodenly for just one instant, and then deliberately put his hand in front of his mouth. His hard blue eyes bulged and grew moist, and his morocco-leather complexion turned a deeper shade of maroon, while odd, wheezing noises were heard in his interior. It only lasted a moment, this spasm, but it was quite effective; Ikeda stiffened and drew his head back like a snake about to strike.

"You are amused, it seems," he said in a dry voice. "It is very funny, no doubt—"

Kappie De Vries clapped him on the shoulder. *"Na, na, na!"* he said. "You must not be so with me, Ikeda. A little realism, now—between grown-ups, not children, eh? We do not need to act, you and I, *goedverdom!"*

"I do not understand you," said Ikeda, still stiff as a ramrod, and Kappie roared.

"Do you know what, my friend?" he said, recovering himself, and gesturing at the Japanese consulate with its sun flag

blowing in the wind outside it. "I will make you a little bet. You have some interesting new possessions in there, safe in your own territory. And you are at present enjoying yourself very much inside you, laughing quietly at a certain silly Dutchman. Not so, Mynheer?"

Ikeda allowed himself the very faintest of grins. "No," he said. "I assure you on my honor that you are wrong. We have nothing either new or interesting in yonder—and as for laughing at you, I am very far from being so impolite. I am very, very sorry for you, Inspector-*san*. You have so much trouble, I think—"

He stood watching Kappie stride away, and then he went into the consulate. There were three or four of his co-workers there, and they said very little. But there was an air of subdued excitement and of expectancy, and it was as if everyone was just standing by for something. But it was mid-afternoon before Ikeda was called to the telephone; he listened carefully to the brief, guarded suggestion from the other end.

"I shall be there," he said levelly, and hung up.

IV

THEY took what was left of the late Sir Reginald Butterworth, and embalmed it, and fixed it up generally, and had a Dutch destroyer to return it to Singapore and its own people, and there were formalities and escorts and uniforms down to the harbor, and all the panoply of ceremonious woe.

Kappie De Vries, rigid in front of his granite row of constables, endured the affair with what composure he could. He had just spent an entire day at the inquiry into the murder, and what he had got there was plain hell. The Hollander government, both in distant Europe and here, was displeased with him—stirred up as it had never been before—and things had been said and questions asked that still had hot flushes chasing themselves all over his body. And what made it worse, there was nothing to be done, it seemed. The papers had gone; it mattered not at all that everyone knew where they were, either. They were as un-get-at-able as if on the moon, there in that building with the fried-egg flag outside it. And Ikeda was laughing at him, after all.

Kappie saw the little procession pass by toward the destroyer, saw the dignitaries and transparencies that followed it—and then he had a very queer experience. He was looking straight across the narrow strip of carpeted dock, straight into a man's eyes, not twenty feet away. The man was Ikeda, in the completest of full official rig. But it was the expression on Ikeda's face that got Kappie.

The Japanese was standing perfectly still, his hat on his arm, and the sun beating down on his gold-rimmed spectacles and dark, clever features. He was staring at a point away to Kappie's left—at something the inspector could not see—and if ever a look said murder, Ikeda carried it for just that instant. Kappie had seen plenty of tough mugs in his time, but this one had them all stopped cold. It was just a flash, the merest glimpse, and then it was gone; Ikeda stirred and put his hat on and turned away, with a word and a smile for acquaintances, and all the veneer back in its place again. But Kappie had seen what he had seen.

"Almighty!" he muttered to himself—and the parade broke up, and he had a chance to turn and follow the line of that deadly, reptilian glare. He found himself feasting on the lavish and disconcerting charms of Mrs. Alice Entwhistle, in a marvelous creation of blue, with her plump companion fairly exuding goodwill and human-kindness at her side.

Kappie De Vries held his breath. Very cautiously, and without any appearance of haste, he resumed his place, hitched up his belt, and barked the orders necessary to remove his police honor-party from the

dock. Marching back through the town he said nothing, scarcely glanced to right or left—but once inside headquarters, he went into the inner office, sat blinking in his chair for a few moments, and then summoned Jan.

"Shut the door!" he said crisply.

IT WAS very nearly dark, the close sticky darkness of the Indies, when Yoshimoto Ikeda stood on a lonely trail four miles outside the city, waiting.

He was still, motionless as a statue, except for his eyes, flicking shuttlewise at the gathering shadows—and he had a pistol in his pocket. Mr. Ikeda was in about as dangerous a mood as anyone between there and elsewhere just then.

Not that the so-called Entwhistle seemed to be aware of that. He materialized along the trail, swinging his arms cheerfully and whistling.

"Hello!" he said at sight of Ikeda. "You're there, eh? Well, made up your mind yet?"

Ikeda was silent for an instant. "Yes," he said. "Fifty thousand dollars—as offered to begin with. That is all, and not a yen more."

Entwhistle laughed. "Don't be funny," he said. "You've forgotten what I told you. A million—and not a yen less, my slit-eyed Oriental!"

Again there was a silence, and then Ikeda sucked in his breath. "Listen, if you please," he said with a species of patience. "This is not funny, and my government does not play that kind of poker. You will hand over the papers, Mr. Entwhistle, or——"

"Or what?" said Entwhistle in an entirely different tone. It was almost staggering, coming out of his round, well-fed body. "Or what, Ikeda?"

"Or you will so very certainly be killed," said Ikeda quietly, his hand in his pocket.

Entwhistle stood looking at him for a moment, although both their faces were almost invisible.

"My good ass," he said, "don't talk rot. If you kill me—or Alice—or both of us, where are you? You just don't lay your hooks on the papers, that's all. I haven't got 'em here, I assure you; nor has Alice in the hotel. So chew on that one a bit, and then be sensible. A million's our price."

Ikeda muttered something to himself in Japanese, and probably there was no one in the entire Indies so near to death as Entwhistle while he was thus engaged. But he was, after all, a realist, as Kappie had enjoined him to be. He spoke in remonstrance.

"In America, this is—how do you say?—a stick-up, eh?" he said. "But you cannot stick-up a government, Entwhistle-*san;* it is so very silly."

"Think so?" said Entwhistle coolly. "Seemed rather ingenious to me—either we get our million, and get away with it, or you don't see those papers. And if there happens to be any monkey-work, why, you still don't see 'em, that's all."

"Suppose," said Ikeda levelly, "I go to the police with the truth of Butterworth's killing—"

"You wouldn't be believed," said Entwhistle instantly. "And even if you were, you still wouldn't get the papers. Besides, this De Vries loves you a lot, from what I can make out—he'd eat up the idea of getting you as an accessory, my boy!"

Voices in the growing darkness, rising and falling—and then a fierce, furious squall and a further gabble of Japanese from Ikeda, and Entwhistle's comfortable, confident belly-laughter!

KAPPIE DE VRIES said, *"Goedverdom!"*

He had been sitting at his desk all the afternoon, burning the wires hither and yon, and there was a pile of flimsies in front of him, representing replies received from various interesting quarters on the subject in hand.

They were illuminating, some of these,

because they came out of police departments and under-cover agencies of governments—and they did a great deal more than hint that Entwhistle and his gorgeous comrade were by no means a couple of right guys. In fact, by this time Kappie had a very fair notion of who they were in real life, and that was a pretty story, too.

Normally, the fiery inspector would have been in action long ago, with the material now before him—

But he scratched his shaven head, and looked at Jan, and swore.

"Ja," he said. *"Ja,* that is all very well. A pair of *schellums,* beyond doubt, and I would not be a particle surprised if we have not the killer of Butterworth between them. But where does that get us? Unless I am a booby, Jan, it is they that have those accursed papers—and if you will tell me how we are to obtain them——"

There was a faint sound all at once, a sound familiar to both of them, the scratching at a back window-screen. Kappie broke off in a hurry.

"Ali," he said. "Go to him, Jan. Maybe he has something."

Ali was one of Kappie's pet creations, a highly educated Malay-Mohammedan who combined the appearance of a third-rate coolie with the eyes and ears of a blackfellow tracker and the here-there-and-everywhere omnipresence of a Scotch mist. He was Kappie's chief spy in Makassar, and when he reported thus there was usually something dramatic on his mind.

This time it was dramatic all right. He had been shadowing the unconscious Ikeda, and had come direct from that lonesome trail outside town. Five minutes whispered conversation gave Kappie all he wanted to know, and he went back to his chair and slumped himself down in it. From his pocket he drew one of the rat-tailed, poisonous stogies he affected, bit off the end, and—closed his eyes. Jan knowing the signs, withdrew noiselessly, and for the next hour there was complete silence in that office.

And then Kappie chuckled. He did more than chuckle; he broke into hoarse and un-

affected laughter, until the windows rattled and Jan poked an astonished head around the door. Kappie beckoned him in, still shaking all over and with tears in his eyes.

"Listen to me," he said imperiously, "and if you say one word until I am through, my friend, I will—I will break your neck. I have done some strange things now and again, but here is one—what is it the Yankees say?—one for the little book!"

V

AND that was the way Kappie's scandal started—the scandal that had all Makassar by the ears and almost caused some of the town's virtuous *mevrouws* to perish from sheer curiosity.

Because Kappie, artist that he was, conducted the affair with all the secrecy of a brass band and the reticence of a stump orator on a barrel. Next morning, bright and early, he had Micaela look out for him his most immaculate and starchified of white uniforms. He caused his shoes to be pipe-clayed, his belt to be polished till it glittered again—and he spent a good half-hour before the mirror, prinking and preening.

Micaela watched him, with a lifted eyebrow to begin with, and then with intense, if suppressed, mirth.

"Mynheer," she said finally, "what is all this? You are very beautiful, to be sure—you do not need telling that—but why paint the lily thus? Who," she said

with a delighted gurgle, "who is the lucky woman?"

Kappie turned round to her, in the process of winding a crimson cummerbund about his thick, hard middle. He was grinning as well.

"Never mind," he said, with just the right amount of pomposity. "Never mind, *mevrouw*—a man is entitled to his own little—er, friendships, I presume!"

The amusement was wiped off Micaela's face as if with a damp cloth, and she stared at her husband.

"What was that?" she said tartly. "You have no little friendships, Mynheer the fat man, when you are married to me, you comprehend. I do not permit such things—"

She looked, just for the moment, what she was—the descendant of long-knived Dyak sea-pirates — and Kappie dropped into a chair, shirtsleeves and all, and then laughed again until he was speechless. Then he beckoned his indignant spouse, and in a husky whisper, punctuated by guffaws, told her the tale. Micaela heard him out unsmilingly.

"Very good, Mynheer," she said finally. "In the line of duty, remember. And if I find anything else, fat man, remember—there will be one policeman the less in the Indies. Consider that, my friend!"

Kappie looked at her, and he, too, was suddenly sober. "I am considering," he said gravely. "But do you consider, too, Micaela. No matter what talk you hear—and almighty, there will be plenty—"

Micaela suddenly put her hand in front of his mouth. "Fool!" she said. "Do you think I care what they say? I trust you, Kappie—you know that. And now take your coat and go." She giggled. "How many wives, I wonder, would do this—dress up their husbands to go flirting with women better-looking than they are? Answer me that one, Mynheer?"

Kappie answered it in a manner that seemed to be satisfactory to all parties concerned, and departed. From then on his actions were strictly crazy, according to the mass public opinion of the Indies at large.

FOR the better part of an entire week, he was almost constantly dancing attention on the Entwhistle calamity. He spent hours in the hotel in company with the pair. He was most flagrantly neglectful of his office duties, of the cables and inquiries and demands that still came pouring in from Batavia. He was seen driving in a government car with the couple, entertaining them at tiffin at the club, lying on the beach at Makassar's version of the Lido. Within twenty-four hours tongues were clacking, in three days Micaela was being told things by affectionate friends, and in four Entwhistle cornered his lady.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "You gettin' weak in the head?"

The ravishing companion of his adventures shook that lovely apendage.

"No," she said. "It isn't my head that's the weak one, Tony. It's yours. If you can't see what I see, I'm sorry for you, that's all. This chappie's going to be worth plenty to us."

Entwhistle sat considering for a while. He was still deadlocked with Ikeda, and there had been certain indications that the Japanese might after all be too hot to handle. Their hotel rooms had been searched, twice, with disconcerting thoroughness; Entwhistle had observed, with the beginnings of a qualm, that they were being followed with quiet persistence wherever they went; and what was worse, Ikeda was silent. He had said nothing at all since that night on the road. Entwhistle was just a trifle nervous.

"I don't follow," he said dubiously. "Let's have it—"

So the fair, and very intelligent, lady let him have it, and it was good. So good, that Entwhistle could only gape at her for a moment.

"Good Lord!" he said at last. "That is

a notion, too. Yes, that might just do the trick. Cora, you're a smart one!"

Alice Entwhistle, by rights Cora Maxwell, lay back on her cushions, looking like a pocket edition of Cleopatra, Mona Lisa, and Ninon de l'Enclos rolled into one.

"All right," she said. "Put it up to him."

Entwhistle did so. It took him quite a lot of trouble, getting hold of Ikeda, and to begin with that little diplomat was highly stiff and stand-offish. But after Entwhistle had talked for five minutes, he began to weaken.

"You've had three or four tries at him," the fat man said. "Never mind how I know—I do. And each time he's beaten you, cold. You can't kill him, because you're scared of international ructions—so you took a crack at getting him laughed at, and where did that land you? He did the laughing, eh? Well, he won't laugh this off. He can't. He'll be so deep dipped, they'll *have* to fire him."

Ikeda frowned. "And the price?" he said. "One million dollars—for that and the papers?"

"Obviously," said Entwhistle. "It's worth it, too."

Ikeda said, "Meet me again. I must consult upon this—"

HE CONSULTED, right back to Tokyo, and he was smiling when he foregathered with Entwhistle once more. It seemed that Tokyo had pretty strong views on Mynheer Inspector Kappie De Vries—as well they might—and were prepared to back them with hard cash. Entwhistle went back to the hotel, and there, to be sure, was the excellent inspector, face to face in the lounge with the intoxicating Alice, and looking more like an infatuated codfish than Entwhistle would have believed possible.

He glanced up as the stout man came in, and a faint glint of annoyance appeared on his leathery features.

"Very well, then," he said rising. "It is understood—tomorrow, almighty! I shall do myself the pleasure of calling for you in the morning—and for your husband, if he is disengaged."

The discouraging look which accompanied this last was one of Kappie's absolute masterpieces, and Entwhistle answered to it like a ship to the helm.

"Too bad," he said. "Met a fellow in the club this morning. Going fishing, outside the harbor. You two go on, though—never mind about me. What's the program, Inspector?"

Kappie was looking immeasurably relieved. He positively beamed at Entwhistle.

"I was thinking, Mynheer," he said in his oiliest tones, "of showing madame—and you, too, if you would have come—some of our views around here. Up in the mountains we have famous sights."

"Why not?" said Entwhistle. "Mighty good of you to think of it, Inspector."

And so Kappie went strutting out of the hotel, with a hundred pairs of protruding eyes fastened on him. They followed him all down the street, and from the club verandah other dumbfounded faces turned as he passed. The gin-sippers there forgot their *pahits,* watching the broad-shouldered, brilliant figure threading its way among the crowd.

"For God's sake—" they said blankly, and incredibly left it there. Kappie De Vries certainly rocked humanity in Makassar, now that he had given his mind to it.

But once inside his headquarters and closeted with Jan, things were different. He ran his eye over the piled wires and reports, sniffed disdainfully at most of them, and then glanced humorously at Jan.

"Well?" he said.

THE SERGEANT was not altogether amused. He had just spent some very trying hours, answering questions from a number of people, men and women. The

men desired to know whether the old crocodile had at length taken leave of his senses —and the women, pretty well universally, had recommendations to make; suggestions as to suitable treatment for Kappie, neither kind no backward.

Micaela was well-liked around and about, and those big Dutchwomen could certainly use their tongues.

"Mynheer—" he said, and stopped doubtfully. Kappie was looking up at him with a grin that slit his face from ear to ear.

"Chup!" he said. "Forget it, Jan. Let them talk. Tomorrow they have something to chew on, all of them, I think. And then we see—what we shall see, *goedverdom!"*

He was apparently enjoying himself—and so, if looks went for anything, were the couple down in the hotel. Entwhistle walked up and down the sitting-room of their suite, rubbing his hands.

"Right!" he said. "And now the next move's up to you. Got the thing lined up, eh?"

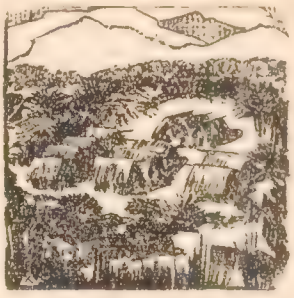
The lady shrugged delicious shoulders. "Leave it to me," she said. "I'll look after my end of it. How about you? Don't you spoil it, now—"

"Not me!" Entwhistle chuckled. "I've got the injured-husband part, off my heart. By the time I've done with him, that fool's going to look like a nickel. There'll be nothing for him to say."

They spoke in undertones for a long while, analyzing and sifting the situation. Nobody could have accused them of lack of nerve just then—they possessed a certain brand of cold, maniac courage that only the big-time, international breed of crook seems to foster—and when the manager tapped at their door, late, they might have been the most ordinary pair of globe-trotters anywhere extant. Entwhistle admitted the hotel-man, who was consumed by some kind of excitement.

"I—I wished to say," he babbled, "that there has been an arrest, Mynheer. They have found him—the *duyvil* that killed the Englishman."

There was an instant's silence, but neither of the couple so much as batted an eyelash. Entwhistle produced a handkerchief and blew his nose.



"You don't say so?" he said. "That's fine, fine. Who was it, Mr. Brevoort?"

Brevoort had all the facts, just as most of the rest of Makassar had by now. The nicely-timed little procession had passed along the streets at their most crowded hour of the evening—two of Kappie's most imperturbable constables dragging a shrinking brown man between them.

"A Malay," the manager said. "I had thought as much, Mynheer. There was a kreese at the poor gentleman's side."

Entwhistle raised his eyebrows. "There was, eh?" he said, in a voice that in spite of himself was not quite steady. "Well, I'm glad they got the fellow. Don't miss much, your police here, do they?"

He ushered Brevoort forth and closed the door behind him.

"Well?" he said, turning. "What d'you know now? Am I smart—or am I smart? I told you it'd work like that, didn't I?"

His colleague yawned delicately. "Maybe," she admitted. "Don't you be getting too smart, though, Tony. We're not out of this yet—"

But the many-aliased Tony Le Grand scarcely listened to her. He was bubbling over with excitement.

"A million dollars," he chortled. "A million dollars—and the old badger-game on a damned Dutchman!"

He shook all over like a jellyfish, and

Cora pulled her distracting mouth into a bow of disapproval—though she winked while she did it.

"Don't be coarse, Tony," she said. "Remember—I'm a lady!"

VI

BRIGHT and early, Mynheer Inspector Kappie De Vries was abroad, arrayed like all the lilies of the field.

He had left his bungalow that morning with a scowl on his face that was intended to impress—and he did most devilishly impress—the various fat *mevrouws* watching him from behind their window-shades. The picture he desired to draw for them was that of a husband who has just put his foot down with his wife; told her where she gets off, in fact, and stalked out of the house, probably kicking the dog in the process.

The virtuous ladies clucked their tongues at the spectacle, and one and all made dates with themselves to drop in on Micaela shortly, to borrow a teaspoonful of spice.

Kappie marched down to the headquarters office, nodded casually in reply to Jan's mechanical salute, and climbed into his car. He had a lavish lunch-basket aboard, and just to add the perfect touch, he drove slowly down the Leidenstraat and stopped at the flower-shop there. When he came out of it, he had a bouquet of expensive blooms large enough to fill a greenhouse, and the proprietor's eyes were bulging like a lobster's. Kappie placed the blooms carefully in the car, looked about him, and then drove over to the hotel stoep.

Either by accident or design, he had to wait there—wait in bright sunshine, on Makassar's most crowded corner, with what amounted to a wedding-garment on and that heap of flowers in the back seat, for twenty minutes. Some half, it may be estimated, of the city's ninety-thousand population enjoyed that sight, but Kappie appeared not to notice them. He sat there behind the wheel, looking straight before him—a spectacle for gods and men.

Then Mrs. Entwhistle came out, and that, too, was something. She had, in some incredible fashion or other, managed to make herself look about eighteen, and a shrinking eighteen at that. The lookers-on, who had so far been concentrated on Kappie with a species of pity, abruptly changed their minds. This was a bad business, they held, anyway you considered it. Kappie De Vries, the venerable scoundrel, liked 'em young—and where, ten million devils, was this pretty one's husband?

They were still asking that question when Kappie handed the lady into the car, marched round it, and slid under the wheel. Makassar gave a positive gasp as he let his clutch in and drove away. Almighty, now what?

Makassar buzzed and hummed. It buzzed and hummed all that long, hot day, while Micaela fended off indignant consolers, and Jan went about like a graven image. Along about four in the afternoon, the Batavia plane came in—and twenty minutes later Sergeant Jan found himself facing a chilly-mannered party with an official look in his eye. Jan knew who he was all right—the governor's secretary of state, and a fiend for the proprieties.

"Where," said he curtly, "is Inspector De Vries?"

Jan said he didn't know, which was strictly and lamentably true. The secretary took a single glance at the piled-up documents on the desk, failed to listen to Jan's stammered, cooked-up excuses, and went away from there. He went to the citadel, where men avoided his eye and changed the subject when he spoke of Kappie. And in an ominous silence he sat down to wait.

That was an error, perhaps. He should maybe have gone out on the street and caught Kappie returning with his guest, which the Inspector did around dusk. Mrs. Entwhistle was looking lovelier than ever, and her smile would have wooed

the birds from the sky. She stood, faintly hesitant, talking to Kappie at the car—and then she asked him to come in and take tea with her. Kappie accepted instantly, and the pair went upstairs to the Entwhistle suite.

Now as to what happened, half an hour thereafter, there have been scores of accounts—but Brevoort, the manager, tells the best story. He tells it almost with bated breath, still, as the prize sensation in a career not without a plenty of such.

HE WAS in his office, Brevoort says, and just thinking for the thousandth time what a mess life is, when he heard the yells. Yells, they were, he says—not mere shouts, but a man yelling at the top of his voice. Everyone in the lounge heard them too, because by the time Brevoort got across and half way up the stairs they were all on their feet, peering and whispering. Brevoort made straight for the Entwhistle suite—he knew very well it was from there, he insists—wrenched the door open, and looked in.

Well, he says, it was the kind of scene he'd read about. There was the lady, with her flimsy muslin dress ripped down half off one shoulder. And there was the husband, just come out of the bathroom, where he'd been right along, it seemed. And there was Kappie, bolt upright, and bright crimson in the face. The woman had her hands up to her eyes, and it was Entwhistle that was doing the yelling. He'd pulled a gun, too, quite in the correct manner.

Brevoort says he nearly fainted—but somehow or other he got across the room and took the gun away from Entwhistle. The fat man was gibbering now, and pointing—and there was a crowd in the doorway, bug-eyed with interest, and ready with outstretched ears to gather up whatever Entwhistle had to say.

Which was plenty. He certainly did a lovely job, and so did the lady. Brevoort smiles ruefully, recounting it, but he has not got over it yet. A murder in a hotel is one thing, but this was another—also it was Kappie De Vries, and that, Brevoort felt then, was the end. He hadn't the barest notion of what came next. And in the middle of it, just when the strain was becoming utterly intolerable, there was a surge among the people in the doorway, and a face—a long, chilly, official face—shoved itself through them. It took in the scene, and there was a frozen pause.

"Wat drommel!" said Mr. Secretary Van Diemen, jolted clear out of his Olympian composure. "What the devil is this?"

Nobody said anything for a single instant, and then Entwhistle cut loose again.

"That man!" he howled with outstretched finger. "He—he did it. He put his dirty hands on my wife—didn't he, Alice? I'll have his blood if it takes me from here to hell. I'll kill him—I'll drag him through every court there is. I'll——"

"Be silent!" Mynheer Secretary Van Diemen may have been an official yard-o'-pump-water, but he knew a crisis when he saw one. "Be silent, Mynheer. I attend to this."

He walked across to the door and shut it, swiftly and competently, in the faces of the mob there; and it is on record that he showed small reverence for toes and fingers in the process. Then he swung back into the room.

"Inspector," he said dryly, "do you desire to—say anything?"

Entwhistle laughed harshly. "Say anything!" he sneered. "What's there to say? I saw the thing, I tell you—and everybody knows."

THE secretary shot him a rapid, veiled glance. Somehow, in some indefinable manner, he had the conviction that there was an odor here—an over-ripe aroma as of long-kept cheese, a whiff of ancient crookery. Kappie De Vries might have been making a stupendous ass of himself over a woman, as report had had it; but this, now, was something else again.

"Be still!" he snapped at Entwhistle. "Inspector, you heard me. Do you wish to comment, at this time?"

Kappie De Vries had been standing perfectly still in the middle of the carpet, his arms folded and an expression on his face Van Diemen at least might have interpreted. He was still that bright crimson, and the little vein in his forehead that spelt trouble was going pump-pump-pump. His brilliant blue eyes were like points of ice—and he seemed to be listening for something. There was a sudden noise outside, a shuffle and heavy breathing by the tall open window, and a figure stood in it, stepping off the fire-escape that ran up the hotel wall outside. It was Jan, and behind him were other blue-clad forms.

"Eh?" said Van Diemen. "What—what now?"

He was soon enlightened. Kappie stirred. He stepped sharply forward to Entwhistle and stopped in front of him.

"I arrest you," he said, "Anthony Le Grand, for the killing of Sir Reginald Butterworth. Jan, the handcuffs!"

Brevoort was still in the room, and he says the pseudo-Entwhistle recoiled as if someone had slashed him across the face. He went a claybank gray—and then he pulled himself together and fought.

"Wh-what's that?" he said. "Oh, no, you don't, my friend. There's no sliding out that way. You can't bluff me—you've got your man already, anyway. Hey, stop it, I tell you, or it'll be the worse for you."

JAN could move like lightning in the operation he was now performing, and Entwhistle's wrists were already pinioned, and there was a stout Dutchman at each shoulder. He raved for an instant, but the woman spoke.

"Wait, everybody," she said in her low, musical voice. "There's some terrible mistake here."

Kappie faced her, ignoring Entwhistle. "I think not," he said. "I think not, Madame. Your name is—Cora Maxwell, is it not?"

"That's a lie!"

Brevoort's account of it is that it was just like—horribly like—one of those quick-change affairs you see done with distorting mirrors. He swears she aged thirty years in five seconds, and her voice was a fishwife's squall. Kappie shrugged and looked at Van Diemen.

"Mynheer," he said. "I have the history of these two in my office. Moreover, the evidence to support this arrest I produce—now. Petrus," he said to a constable at the window, "admit him."

There was a shift among the figures there, and a wizen figure with a straggly beard entered. Entwhistle took a single look at him and fell silent. Kappie spoke.

"Suleiman Ben Daoud," he said by way of introduction. "Dealer in—curios. Is this he, Suleiman?"

The newcomer squinted at Entwhistle and nodded. "It is he, *sidi,*" he said, and Kappie put his hand in his pocket.

"You know this?" he said steadily, handing him the kreese. Suleiman examined it carefully.

"It is from my store, *sidi,*" he said. "Japanese work. I sold such a one to this man."

Entwhistle broke out, foaming. "That's not evidence," he said. "Sure I bought one of those things there. But what's that prove? They're common as dirt."

Kappie smiled. *"Ja,"* he said. "That is true. Common as dirt—and moreover, the killing was not done by such a weapon. Eh, Mynheer?"

"How do I know?" fumed Entwhistle. "Take these damned things off me!"

Kappie had turned to the woman. "Madame," he said, "do you desire me to show you what *did* do the killing?"

He dropped his hand in his pocket again, and before that gesture even Cora Maxwell's steely nerves collapsed utterly.

"No—no!" she said. "I didn't do it. He took it—out of my manicure set."

Kappie dropped his hand to his side—empty. "I thank you, Madame," he said. "A nail-file, eh? That is interesting; you see, I was not sure, not quite sure."

Entwhistle suddenly exploded into a perfect torrent of abuse, directed against his late partner and associate. Kappie stood impassively until he had run down.

"So?" he said. "We have an accusation—and evidence that is strong, but might be broken. This case is not perfect, eh, Mynheer?"

He was addressing the secretary, who had been silently taking in the scene. "I do not know, Inspector," he said. "It appears to me that the case is formidable enough—"

Kappie allowed himself another smile. "Then, Mynheer," he remarked quietly, "let us complete it."

He held out his hand to Jan, and the non-com produced a screw driver. With it, and in the midst of an utter silence, Kappie advanced to the gumwood skirting-board. At a point opposite the couch and the deserted tea-table he knelt down, peering.

"Ah! he said. "I imagined so—"

There was a scuffle behind him, a sudden wildcat squeal, and a terrific oath from Sergeant Jan. A pistol-shot cracked, and the bullet went splintering into the plaster ceiling. Jan wrenched the little gun out of the woman's hand, and subdued her with a twist of his powerful fingers. Kappie scarcely looked round.

"I thank you, Jan," he said and continued with his work. A joint in the gumwood gave with a crack under the tool's broad blade, and Kappie thrust an arm inside. He rose to his feet, a flat bundle of papers in his hand.

"Mynheer," he said to Van Diemen, "you had better take charge of these—they are valuable."

The secretary reached for them, and his expression would have made the fortune of a caricaturist.

"How?" he stammered. "How, Kappie? In the name of God?"

But Kappie did not answer him. He was looking at Cora Maxwell, livid in Jan's iron grip.

"Madame," he said, "there is a little matter there for you to consider. And I think you will have a long, long while in which to do so!"

VII

THEY marched them off, Anthony Le Grand and Cora Maxwell, to the places reserved for them—and Makassar rocked with the impact of that sight. Kappie De Vries, once more the grim, tight-mouthed figure of old, walked back along the silent, whispering streets, Van Diemen at his elbow and a look on his face that dared anyone to make a sound. He went straight to his bungalow, and Micaela met him at the door. She was perfectly composed, and had a tray of little drinks set out ready—it might have been the most ordinary of evenings.

"Well, Mynheer," she said with a quirk of the mouth, "it is over, eh? You are no longer the bad *duyvil* that deceives his wife?"

Kappie grinned and introduced Van Diemen. The secretary was still in a species of daze.

"I do not understand," he said. "You have me running in circles, Kappie. Those papers——"

De Vries mixed him a large drink and thrust him down in a chair.

"Be easy, Mynheer," he said, "be easy. It was not magic, to be sure. Only—

there was a little arranging, a little knowledge, maybe,"—he flicked a glance at Micaela—"of women. We had to have the papers, no? I could have arrested that *schellum* five days ago, but what was the use? They would not say where the papers were, either of them—and after all, the case, as I said, was not perfect."

Van Diemen scratched his head. "Still I do not see," he confessed, and Kappie chuckled. He suddenly jumped half out of his chair.

"Micaela!" he gasped. "Quick—someone is outside."

His wife was out of her seat in a flash, and half across the room to the nursery.

"What—where?" she stammered. Kappie lay back and laughed.

"Nothing," he said. "There is no one there, little one. Only, I was showing Mynheer Van Diemen something. You see, Mynheer? You see what this one had on her mind? The baby, eh? And all the time she thinks of that, eh? She cannot help it, naturally; it is mere automatism—it worries her day and night. Well, that lovely lady yonder also had a thing that worried her. That is all."

He broke off and sipped his drink, twinkling. Van Diemen fidgeted.

"Proceed, proceed," he said. "Maybe I see, but proceed."

Kappie shrugged. "It was necessary," he said, "to make this lady nervous—in the place where the thing was that worried her. She was nervous this evening there with me, waiting to—to spring the trap. And for half an hour, Mynheer, I watched her eyes. That was all. Simple, eh?"

Van Diemen inclined his head. "When you know how, everything is simple, my friend," he observed sententiously. "But there is yet another matter here. These people, it was reported, were in the pay of the Japanese? How, then, did they still have the papers?"

Kappie winked. "Ah," he said. "That is, as you say, another matter again, Mynheer. You had better ask Ikeda for the answer to that one."

He stopped abruptly, for this time there had certainly been a sound outside. Someone came light-footed up the verandah steps and knocked at the door. Kappie frowned; he motioned to Micaela without a word and she slipped into the dark kitchen. Kappie reached across for a drawer in the table, and stood up, with his hand behind his back and something shining in it.

"Enter," he said. "Enter, Mynheer—"

The door opened quietly, and Ikeda's round, intelligent face shone in the lamplight. He was smiling and bowing—and he held his arms very clear of his sides, with the palms showing. Kappie relaxed and quietly dropped the pistol in the drawer again.

"I bid you a very good evening, Ikeda," he said. "You will come in, no?"

The Japanese entered and took a seat; Kappie handed him a drink, but Ikeda left it untasted. He was looking extremely uncomfortable all at once, and the smile had vanished.

"I wished," he said huskily, "to congratulate you, Inspector-*san*. A remarkable affair, it seems—so very remarkable!"

Kappie's face never so much as moved. "I thank you," he said. "I thank you, Ikeda. It was nothing, however—merely an ordinary killing."

His eyes bored at the Japanese, with the shadow of an almost unbearable mirth behind them. Ikeda twisted his hands together.

"So very nice," he murmured, and was silent. Kappie let him stew for a full minute, contemplating him across the rim of his glass, and then he burst into a perfect bellow of laughter.

"*Na, na, na,* Ikeda!" he said. "Out with it, man. Between us there are surely no secrets. You wish to know about the papers, eh? Well, we have them—and have them safe, my friend. *Ja,* upon my honor it is so. So we are so very happy,

eh, and you—well, you are in pocket, as I believe, one million dollars; you too should be happy. And I, my friend, am still Inspector of Police. You are pleased, eh?"

HE drove his questions home, each of them with a grunt that seemed to give him the most intense satisfaction. Ikeda sat quite still, as if he were miles away in thought.

"Yes," he said finally. "Yes, It is all very nice, and everyone is happy. I am happy, though you do not believe me. I am happy because I thought for a little while I should have to—to kill you, maybe, Inspector-*san*. And that would be a pity; such a very great pity. You see, I have a liking for you, if it is not rude to say so."

"*Ja!*" Kappie rumbled. "I know, Ikeda—I know. You have a liking for me, but if there ever came a chance to—what is it you say?—liquidate Kappie De Vries——"

He fell silent, watching Micaela in the kitchen. She had the family carving-knife and was running her delicate finger up and down its keen edge. Kappie scowled, and shook his fist at her, so that Ikeda turned round inquiringly. But Micaela stood in the doorway, smiling at him—as refreshing a young housewife as you might see from Haarlem to Hongkong. Kappie raised his glass.

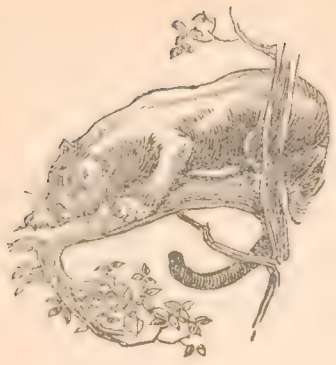
"Ikeda," he said, "let us drink. Let us drink to ourselves—and may the day never come when one or the other of us is not hereabouts to do so. *Prosit*, Mynheer—*prosit!*"

Yoshimoto Ikeda looked at his smiling face, and at Micaela's, and at Van Diemen's, and what he saw there seemed to choke him. He said nothing — but he lifted his drink, and as he touched it to his lips his lean brown hand was trembling. He was a very curious little party, this Mr. Ikeda, servant of the Rising Sun; a queer, queer mixture, in anybody's vocabulary.

Air crash sequences in the movies were washed up, so the word went out around to Washington Production Studios. So Tom Penn and his crash-crazy friends were looking for something new under the sun in air pictures. And did they find it? You ought to hear Caffrey tell it in his novelette.

In the next
SHORT STORIES
NO MORE CRASHES
by
A. A. Caffrey

10



Adventurers All

The Fighting Cougar

IT HAD been late when I made camp. I had dragged firewood under the drooping branches of a large spruce tree, eaten a hasty lunch and turned in dead tired. From the still glowing embers of the fire I judged I had been asleep but a few minutes when a scratching in the branches above me and a shower of coarse bark falling in my face caused me to become instantly awake and alert. My woodsman sense told me it was an animal, and in those North Canadian woods it might be anything from a harmless porcupine to a vicious cougar.

Reaching for my rifle and cruising axe I cautiously crept nearer the fire and poked it into a blaze. My first move, however, brought a warning snarl. I sprang to my feet as a large dark animal hurtled past me, striking my rifle. It not only discharged it, but sent it flying beyond my reach, also cutting two painful gashes in my left hand. A hasty glance around failed to reveal my gun and I had no time to search, for the huge beast was preparing for another spring.

Crouching low, with its blunt muzzle wrinkling into a hideous mask, its ears set back, and eyes glaring above gnashing teeth, the cougar, for such it was, leaped straight at me. Springing to one side I warded off the full force of the charge, but received a deep gash in my shoulder. I dared not take my eyes off the vicious beast, for instantly it had swung and crouched to the earth for another attack. I managed to duck below its reach and grab my axe which lay near the fire.

Several times we sparred in this manner with the cougar winning most of the points. I received several nasty slashes on my left shoulder, which always seemed to get in the way of the cougar's hind feet. Finally I succeeded in landing a wicked blow to the ribs, causing the cat to sulk to a safe distance, hissing, and snarling in a fearful rage. I shuddered as it seemed vainly to be trying to lure me from the fire.

Feeling certain the beast would make another lunge at me, and growing nervous from my strained position I ventured to move. Sending forth another yowl that caused my hair to raise, the cougar flew at me. With a wide swing of the axe as I ducked to one side, I heard a snapping sound and sensed a sudden check of speed. I felt the cougar was badly injured, so quickly taking advantage of the moment, I delivered several damaging blows before the cat retreated. Feeling safer near the fire I didn't follow up my attack, for the cat had sneaked under low hanging bows that offered protection. There it crouched and began batting its eyes.

Unforunately, thinking I had done more damage than I really had, I moved toward her, only to hear another blood curdling scream and see the curling lips tighten. From my position I discovered the animal's right fore leg to be broken above the knee. Her hissing, snarling and violent switching

of the tail continued as she began settling down, with her back paws digging in she gave another fearful yell.

The suspense, though short, was terrible.

I fairly dreaded the cat's next move, which I now knew was sure to come. With a couple of short, quick jumps the cougar came with the vim of a fresh tiger. The broken leg did not seem to bother her. A blow I intended for her head landed on the shoulder, but the force of it stopped her on the spot. For several minutes a lively battle was on at close range, in which the cougar won the round. Luckily I was wearing strong, heavy clothing, for without this protection my legs would have been torn to shreds. They were badly slashed as it was.

It seemed ages before I saw an opening to jump out of the reach of the one flying paw, for fast and furious the cougar was lacing it into me. When my chance did arrive to check the terrible onslaught I hardly had time to square myself before the cat made a fierce charge for my head.

Without flinching I faced the attack and dealt a severe blow at the cougar's head, following it up with several slashing cuts to the body. I hoped this would be the final round. My endurance of this sort of entertainment I knew was limited. My courage as well as my strength was waning and the loss of blood was weakening me.

The cougar, however, was not ready to quit. She had crouched for another round. With my rifle in hand I could have ended the fracas long before, for several times, as now, I had waited for the cougar to move first. Now I was waiting near the fire and dared not move a finger. The hideous grinning cat was perhaps ten feet away and settling for a leap, which she delayed until the shadows of the dying blaze had faded to darkness.

However, my blow turned her. But she quickly swung around for another try. Leaping backward I managed to kick up the fire and with my axe drawn I leaned forward and stared into a pair of eyes that contained less warmth than an iceberg in dead winter, though they shone brighter than balls of fire and looked larger than the big end of a dinner horn.

The distance was too great to strike and I was growing weaker; gradually felt myself sagging, so I began edging forward. I could see the animal's quivering lips tighten exposing a gaping mouth lined with fangs seemingly more than an inch in length.

With a warning scream that sent cold chills shooting along my spine, the cougar made another leap. Leaning more forward the instant she sprang, I swung the axe with all my might and struck the cat fair between the eyes before she had risen a foot from the ground. So furiously did the cougar lash around that I was unable to strike her again. But it was soon over; with a plunge headlong she keeled over and lay quivering before me.

For more than a week I chafed under the spruce tree recovering from my wounds.

Kid McCumber

Sea Monster

I WAS soldiering at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, in 1922, and as was my custom on Saturdays had gone to Halewa Beach for an afternoon's swim in the bay. I hiked around the bay to a rock promontory which gradually crumbles away to a level sandy beach curving sharply to the south. I reached the top, towering thirty feet above the pounding surf, waited until a swell increased the depth of the water—the bottom was rocky—and dived.

I hit the foam in a clean dive and struck out. A black form resembling a huge

garden hose with white saucers on one side arched and writhed out of the green depths near me. It snaked down into the water and my right ankle was seized in a grip that felt like an ice-cold loop of rope and I was dragged backward through the water. I yelled in horror and fear.

An octopus had me!

My horrified eyes swept the beach. It was deserted; I could not expect help from that quarter. I thought of the Hawaiian fishermen's use of the knife in fighting sharks and octopi, but I had no knife. Slowly the octopus towed me toward the cliff from which I had dived. I feared to struggle; he might whip another tentacle around me. Then I saw the octopus; a black shape like a huge spider. He looked as big as a kitchen stove. Near the black center two red, evil, hate-filled eyes glowed at me with almost human intelligence. I yelled for help, praying that the octopus wouldn't get angry at the noise I was making.

Then I saw a feeble gleam of hope. I was being towed to the point where promontory ended in a stretch of sandy beach. With my feet on the bottom I might have a chance. Desperately I glanced down the beach and saw several half-nude, brown-skinned Hawaiian fishermen running toward me. I yelled again and glanced at the octopus. He was partly hidden under an overhanging rock, from under which a black tentacle reached to my ankle. He seemed asleep, though I knew he wasn't. I gave my leg a tentative twist and was jerked viciously under water and toward the horrible form. "This is the end," I thought, and fought to bring my face above water. I resisted the tentacle holding me and tried to draw away. I couldn't; the tentacle seemed as strong as a steel cable, but finally, gasping and trembling, I got my head free of the smothering foam.

A yell came from the beach. The kanakas, carrying spears, were calling to me from the safety of the beach twenty feet away, but I could scarcely hear them, much less understand them. The octopus got another spell of yanking and I got another ducking. Again I succeeded in getting my head above water—and a tentacle smacked me in the face and writhed around my head. I wildly flung up an arm and it slipped off. Then I saw that I was within six feet of the monster.

A long spear with a thin rope attached to its handle flashed through the bright sunlight, passing within four feet of me. Fascinated, I watched its sharp point pierce the octopus just above the spot from which the tentacles branched. Instantly the water around the devilfish got inky black and was thrashed with squirming, black tentacles, their under surfaces covered with white, saucer-shaped suction cups, some of them nearest the body the size of dinner-plates. I was flung about like a ball on the end of a rope. While I floundered around trying to keep from drowning I glanced at the men on the shore and saw that they were tugging on a rope; the one affixed to the spear imbedded in the octopus.

"Swim for shore," one of them yelled at me. My wits steadied, and pulling for all I was worth I managed to move my body, tentacle still attached, a short distance through the breakers. Finally, the Hawaiians tugging on the rope, I felt sand under my feet. I tottered and stumbled through the surf, the thrashing devilfish still trailing me like a huge, animated ball-and-chain. Someone threw a knife into the surf near me. I fished it out and slashed at the tentacle on my leg. My feeble attempt only angered the octopus. My legs were jerked from under me and I was flung backward in the surf, still holding the knife. A snake-like form shot out, passed within a foot of my face and coiled around the neck of a Hawaiian. Quite calmly and without a second's hesitation, he snatched a knife from his belt and severed it with one powerful stroke. I followed his example. Another tentacle undulated toward me. I stabbed at it with the point of the knife. It flinched and

writhed away. Another slash parted the tentacle—and I was free!

I staggered up onto the beach and lay down on the sand. The Hawaiians went about the business of dispatching the octopus. I'll never forget the agonized and human-like moans of the devilfish as the Hawaiians dragged the dying horror up on the beach.

When I had stopped trembling sufficiently to stand I went forward on weaving legs to thank my rescuers. They poohpoohed the rescue; fighting octopi and sharks is a weekly occurrence in the lives of Hawaiian fishermen.

By rough measurement the two longest tentacles were about nine feet long, overall diameter of the monster was about twenty-one feet. The Hawaiians said it was the biggest octopus they had seen so close to shore, and that had it not been disturbed by my dive it would have not bothered me.

That was the last time I went swimming at Halewa Beach.

Earl Limbaugh.

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JAMES B. HENDRYX

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"Evil Companions"

CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

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Part II of the amazing adventure of that young man of parts

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ALL THE BEST—ALL NEW—ALL IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF

SHORT STORIES

High Adventure

IN THIS issue we begin a new serial of Jackson Gregory's. As we see it, Mr. Gregory does two kinds of stories. There may be more, but we mean two kinds which appeal to SS readers. His highly successful serials of last year and the year before were straight cattle country novels, "High Hand at Rocky Bend", and the like. But as we look back we find that every now and then Mr. Gregory has branched out into a tale of High Adventure, such as "Wild River O'Hara." They have been grand yarns, these thrilling adventure stories, and their heroes—not to mention their heroines—have been favorites with our readers. So we are pleased to have you meet Tony O'Hara, who had some sort of bad luck in Texas and who came North—ready to chew nails, go to hell in a wheel-barrow or any like expedient.

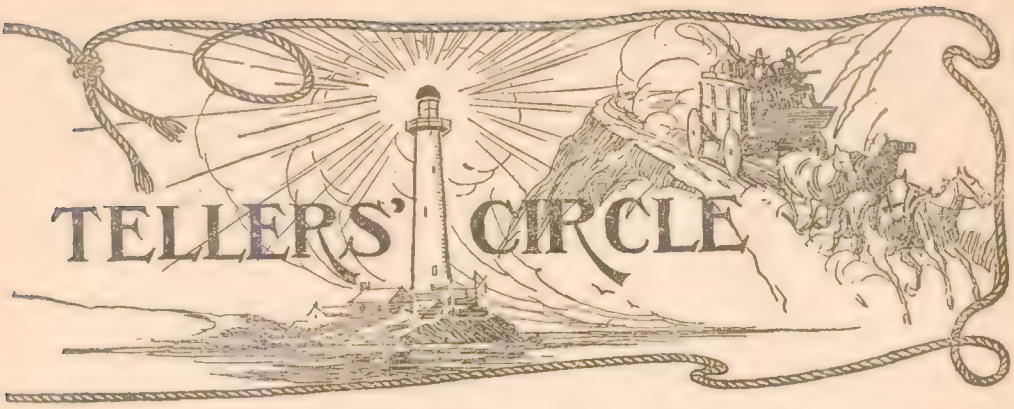
Anyway, Tony was *through fighting;* yes, washed up on using his fists. He proposed to vegetate, let the world go by or what have you. For just how long, we leave you to find out from the Gregory story, but we just wanted to put in a word with you in case you'd overlooked this amazing tale. It is in the best tradition of roving two-fisted heroes and starts off with as neat and unexpected a murder as you'd meet anywhere, then goes not to a man who, if his bleaching bones were any guide, died not only with his boots on, but with a high silk hat as well. So we leave you to Tony O'Hara, Silk Hat Verril and proof of the fact that gold is not only where you find it, but where you don't even want to look for it.

Climb in My Coffin

QUITE an intriguing title Mr. Batson has on his Charleston Charley story in this issue. Concerning it, the author writes:

"My newspaper in Shanghai sent me once into the Far North to interview a former great Chinese official who was in retirement. You can perhaps imagine my surprise when I found the chief furnishing in his enormous living room to be a huge and ornate native-style coffin. The cover was off yet resting at the side, and it was apparent that the taipan would not be caught napping when death should overtake him. Later my interpreter told me of the Chinese custom regarding coffins as related here in the story.

"Thus I have taken fictional license, tied that germ of an idea in with the exploits of the great General Ma whom Chinese-interested readers of newspapers will recall in Manchuria, and out of the whole evolved 'Climb in My Coffin,' General Ma threw in his lot with the Japs on three occasions that are known, and in each, once he was armed and outfitted by the little brown brothers from Nippon to war on his own people, vanished into the fastnesses of Manchuria and led raids on China's conquerors. Once he was captured by the



Japs but adroitly talked his way to another chance. That went the way of the previous one.

"Why were the Japs fooled? To my way of thinking because they were desperate for Chinese assistance, and old Ma was the biggest man in North China. Or, again, perhaps because Ma, like most Chinese, can outwit the Japanese in any given encounter. Today the Japs have learned that and there are no more stories coming from foreign correspondents about Chinese generals being outfitted to war on their own people. Such tricks you say are not ethical warfare? Since when have the Japs been ethical in their attacks on undefended cities? Gas, bombs and shrapnel are teaching the women and children of China that they are engaged in a fight in which ethics are outmoded. Here is a toast to old Ma and another to his fictional counterpart, Woh, Ling-ping."

Alfred Batson

Songs of the Sea

A MODERN sea story such as Berton Cook's "Up the Iron Ladder" in this issue has a powerful lot of tradition behind it. Just think how the old working choruses or chanties of seamen have circled the globe with their rude melodies. They occupy a place by themselves, for they were used alow and aloft, while reefing topsails in a gale, manning the pump-brake, tramping around the windlass when raising the anchor, or in making and trimming sail. The chanty, however, was never heard when the crew was off duty, and that old-time chorus, once so popular, is slowly but surely passing into oblivion along with the ships of the sail.

But the old salts were a musical lot. Every fo'cas'le had its banjo, fiddle, or concertina, for Jack dearly loved a song. In the days of the clipper ships, it was customary to gather around the cabin doors or windows on the main deck when the "old man's" wife or daughter would sing such favorites as "Sweet Alice Ben Bolt," "Flee as a Bird," "Juanita," "Listen to the Mocking Bird," and others, from which it may also be gathered that Jack was a sentimental fellow.

What, then, were the songs which he loved and sang when off duty, either in the dusty and smelly confines of the fo'cas'le or in fine weather in the dog-watches, lounging on the for'ard deck?

It may be emphatically stated that he disgustedly eschewed all those songs which contain false allusions or stupid blunders concerning sea life and sea phrases. Many of these would-be sea-songs have been frequently held up to ridicule: "A Wet Sheet and a Flowing Sea," for example. It is just possible that the writer may have used the word "sheet" rightly, and meant the song to refer to a small fore-and-aft vessel that, when heavily pressed down, might wet her sheets. But Jack, when he heard that piece, was strongly disposed to believe the author thought that a "sheet" was a sail, and this being his suspicion, he could

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never sing the song with the least relish or enjoyment.

From the following accounts it will be seen that many of the popular sailor songs were largely a matter of accident, and that they were usually written by landlubbers. That England has always been a maritime nation perhaps accounts for the fact that the music of the sea is ever in the ears of her sons and daughters. But it is a matter for curious comment that "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," or "A Life on the Ocean Wave," or the two equally famous nautical duets, "The Larboard Watch," and "All's Well," were never heard on shipboard.

In fact, your true deep-water sailor turned green with disgust over such counterfeit phrases as "Yeo-heave-ho!" "Avast!" "So-ho!" "Shiver My Timbers!" or "Strike My Tarry Toplights!" There is one song in which a ship is represented —as "scudding" under a reefed foresail, and on board of which the "tempest"— "strikes the topgallantmast smack-smooth and shivers each splinter of wood!" This is pure nonsense. Sailors don't speak of "tempests," and it would make the cook laugh to see a ship scud under a reefed foresail.

Writers who use these and similar nonsensical epithets know nothing about the nomeclature of the sea. They are men who cannot tell the difference between square-rig and fore-and-aft; who speak of "ropes" when they meant sheets or halyards; and who have obtained their local color by taking a steamer trip across the English Channel or up Long Island Sound. Every now and then a scourge of such nonsense falls upon us.

But there are a large number of beautiful sailor songs, not open to these criticisms, which could have been heard time and time again in many a forecastle of the old windjammers.

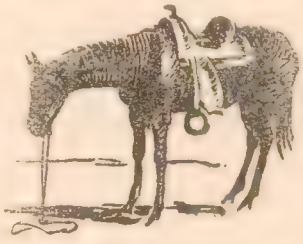
That they have survived and withstood all possible sailory criticisms is the best test of their fealty to truth.

The Cripple of Cripple Creek

MOST old-time prospectors like to tell the story of the Cripple of Cripple Creek, the man who gave his countrymen a mountain of gold, and then passed into oblivion, crippled and beaten, an object of poverty.

Bob Womack was his name, and he died some years ago in Colorado. But for years he had been a helpless paralytic, the cheerfully borne burden of a devoted sister who kept a boarding-house. In Bob's case, the "might-have-been" is estimated at two hundred and eighty-five millions of dollars—the wealth of Cripple Creek.

Bob Womack's father took his family to Colorado in the early sixties, and raised cattle on land they had homesteaded on Cripple Creek. But money did not roll in fast enough, and after a while, the elder Womack tired of it all, left the country. Bob, believing there was gold in the vicinity of Cripple Creek remained true to his hunch, and stayed there.



After years of fruitless search Bob finally found traces of gold in a piece of so-called "float" rock which he picked up while riding range with his brother-in-law, Theodore Lowe. Sending Lowe on a six-day ride to Denver to have the rock assayed, Bob went about his chores, hoping for the best. When Lowe returned with the assayer's certificate, Womack was overjoyed when he discovered the sample of rock gave returns of two hundred and fifty dollars in gold to the ton.

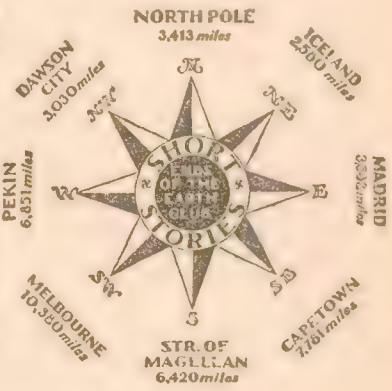
Next morning Womack and Lowe went to the place where Bob had found the rock, in what is now known as Poverty Gulch, just outside the limits of the present

town of Cripple Creek. No other specimens were uncovered and Lowe grew weary of the search and gave up, but Bob persisted. Then, one day in January, 1901, he dug a prospect hole in what was later called the El Paso lode on the Gold King property, and struck a bonanza lode.

Like so many other get-rich-quick prospectors, Bob could not stand prosperity. Going to town he went on a spree and sold his valuable claim for the paltry sum of five hundred dollars, and, crazed with drink and success, he jumped on his mount, galloped down the street brandishing his six-shooter while proclaiming his good fortune to the world. The next few days witnessed one of the biggest rushes to the scene of his discovery that the West has ever known.

When Bob sobered up, two or three days later, he returned to the district, only to find that the best mining property had been located by others. He staked out a claim or two, but they proved worthless, and soon he was compelled to go to work for a day's wages. But he never complained. So to Bob Womack alone belongs the glory if not the riches of Cripple Creek.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Calling for stamps from the Latin Americas.

Dear Secretary:

I would appreciate it very much if you would register my name in the Ends of the Earth Club.

I am 24 years old and have read SHORT STORIES for the last three years. I enjoy the stories very much. In my opinion your best authors are Hendryx, Greene, Bedford-Jones, Gery and especially Arthur O. Friel. Let's have more of his stories of South America soon.

My hobby is stamp collecting and I would like to exchange duplicates with stamp collectors from all over the world; especially those from the Latin-American countries. Sincerely,

George Lutz

1633 N. Marshall St.,
Milwaukee, Wis.

From one who has had plenty of adventure.

Dear Secretary

I am applying for membership in your Ends of the Earth Club. Perhaps I am too old to join—I'm 41. I am eligible as a traveler and adventurer, since I've been a soldier in the regular army, soldiered on the Mexican border and in Mexico, 1916-17 and in the A. E. F., 1917-19, and hospital, 1920-21. I've worked in steel mills, railroad jobs and many others.

I saw some things, and forget a lot; that's the best way. But I'm not a talker so you'll have to let me go ahead and ride along as a listener. I like to hear other people better equipped do the talking. I lost my right eye in the war, and about half of my head was battered to pulp by shell fire.

I can see with glasses, have a silver skull

and my face is laced with gold wire. All I can say is I'm glad it's over, but I feel sure I'd do it again.

Sincerely,
G. Wm. Clark Hoover
132 South Queen St.,
Lancaster, Pa.

Who's looking for information on Yellowstone Park?

Dear Secretary:

I am writing this letter for the pure and simple reason that I wish to join your Ends of the Earth Club so that I may carry on correspondence with fellow members. Although I have not traveled all over the world I have seen quite a bit of the United States.

At the present time I am serving as a Corporal in the CCC. My company is located in Yellowstone National Park, so if there is anyone who would like to know about this National Park I feel that I will be able to give them some interesting information.

I have read but two issues of SHORT STORIES, but I have read both issues from cover to cover. Your stories are first rate and I shall continue to be a regular reader of your fine magazine.

Yours,
LeRoy Walters
Company 535, CCC,
Camp Mammoth, YNP-1,
Yellowstone Park, Wyoming.

We are glad to welcome you as a reader and a member of our club.

Dear Secretary:

I would like to avail myself of the facilities of your Ends of the Earth Club in gaining correspondents from foreign lands.

I am a young man twenty-four years of age. It is only recently that I have commenced reading your magazine and must say that I enjoy your "different" type of stories. If any of your readers will write to me I will endeavor to return an interesting letter. Am interested in nearly everything. Yours truly,
Bernard E. O'Connor
Huntingdon, Que.,
Canada.

From one of Uncle Sam's marines.

Dear Secretary:

As I am a regular reader of SHORT STORIES, and proud of it, I would like to be a member of your Ends of the Earth Club. I am a private in the U. S. Marine Corps. Have been in Honolulu, Guam and all up and down the west coast of China. Am now doing duty in the Philippine Islands. Am twenty years old, five feet, ten inches tall, blue eyes, black hair and am interested in all kinds of sports.

Sincerely yours,
Pvt. J. T. Gibbons
Marine Barracks, N. Y.-YD,
Cavite, Philippine Islands.

From one of our teen-aged members.

Dear Secretary:

I would like to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. I would like to have a list of your members who are stamp collectors as I am a budding one myself. I am sixteen, a sophomore in high school and am pretty good in tennis, handball, badminton, ping-pong and baseball.

Sincerely yours,
Harold Yates
229 South Orange St.,
Brea, Calif.

To Prospective Members:

If you have applied for membership in the Ends of the Earth Club and have not received a reply, in all probability it is because your name and address was not written clearly. If you will print your full name, it will aid us in filling in your membership cards. Too—some of you are so anxious to get your letters off that you seal the envelope without giving us any return

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address. We, of course, have no way of knowing your street addresses, therefore we hold the letters here waiting for a second request. Remember—PRINT your name and address clearly.

James Hanover
Secretary

Sorry

Dear Secretary:

I want to inform you that my name has been published wrong in SHORT STORIES of May, in which you have spelled my name Ulotta instead of Motta. I would like very much if you should correct this mistake and publish my name in the right way.

I am very glad to be a member of the Ends of the Earth Club, and wish good luck to every one.

M. H. Motta

R. Canada 591,
S. Paulo, Brazil

Hobby: Boats, books and ships

Dear Secretary:

We would like to Join your Ends of the Earth Club if we may. Our interests are in boats, books and naval ships and photographs. Please send us our membership cards as soon as possible. We'll answer all letters as soon as possible.

Very truly yours,
James W. Flynn,

65 Staniford St.,
Providence, R. I.

J. J. O'Hearn

61 Prairie Avenue,
Providence, R. I.

A gadabout stamp collector.

Dear Secretary:

I enjoy SHORT STORIES very much and try to never miss a copy but do once in awhile, then I chase all over the second-hand magazine stores trying to get a copy.

Would you please print this letter as I am looking for pen pals from all over the world. I am 29 years old and have been in the Navy where I visited France, Ger-

many, Norway, Scotland, Hawaii, Panama, Cuba and Trinidad. Besides, I have been in 18 or 20 of the states here at home.

My hobby is stamp collecting, hiking and baseball. I also love music but cannot dance. Will exchange stamps with one and all on Scott's standard catalogue basis as medium of exchange.

Yours truly,

Wallace M. Daugherty

604 6th Ave. South,
Seattle, Wash.

Matchbook covers

Dear Secretary:

I am interested in saving book match covers, and from countries who have none, I would like fancy match boxes. I will exchange.

Will you please register my name in your club?

Respectfully yours,

G. H. Burchard

141 Echo Ave.,
Fresno, Calif.

ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB MEMBERS

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

John J. Farrell, Water Mill, L. I., New York
D. H. Feldman, 2514 Woodbark Ave., Baltimore, Maryland
Conrad Fink, Jr., 25 Cleveland Ave., Trenton, New Jersey
R. B. Fulton, Allegheny County Home, Woodville, Pa.
Howard Ganner, Haney, B. C., Canada
Pvt. Jerome T. Gibbons, Marine Barracks, N. Y. YD, Cavite, P. I.

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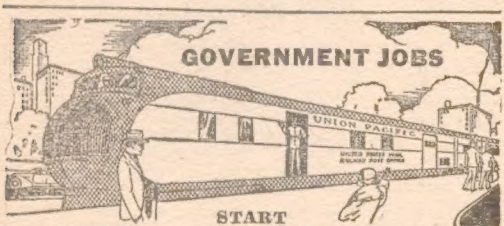

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Address.....

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Harvey E. Hancocks, 5255 Desmond St., Oakland, California
Walter Harbin, Allegheny County Home, Woodville, Pa.
Bernard, Healey, 5673 St. Urbain St., Montreal, Que., Canada
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J. Hubert, 50 Washington Square, New York, N. Y.
A. Irvine, 59 Morley Ave., Winnipeg, Man., Canada
Ambrose Jackson, Jr., 526 Woodlawn Ave., Bristol, Tenn.
Robert J. Kadala, 95 Loiza St., Santurce, Puerto Rico
Leo Kovell, 2376 E. 23rd St., Oakland, Calif.
John G. Kunz, Mirande, Oriente, Cuba
Newell Reid La Rue, New Orleans, La.
Harry LeBlanc, 6540 S. Oakley Ave., Chicago, Illinois
E. J. Levy, 929 McAllester St., San Francisco, California
John McAllister, Leith Harbour Whaling Station, South Georgia, S. Atlantic, Via Port Stanley, Falkland Islands
James A. McCreary, P. O. Box 821, Altoona, Penna.
Willie McLaughlin, Spot Bay, Cayman Brac, B. W. I.
C. F. McQuade, 13 Burton St., Quebec City, P. Q., Canada
Thomas Mahon, 3157 Penock St., Philadelphia, Penna.
Charles A. Mazatas, 28 Lincoln Ave., Trenton, N. J.
Charles F. Millspaugh, Co. 3270 CCC, Williams, Calif.
Frank Moorman, Captiva Island, Florida
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Bernard E. O'Connor, Huntington, Que., Canada
Bernard Papeika, Camp F-34-N, Mimbres, New Mexico
Dennis Petropulos, Asprohoma, Calamata, Greece
Daniel R. Poole, Jr., 717 Snow St., Shreveport, La.
Edward Rau, 316—4th St., West Pittston, Penna.
W. Homer Reeve, Jr., 824 Berckman St., Plainfield, New Jersey
Ralph Rivers, Lulu Island, Eburne, B. C., Canada
Jackie E. Robinson, Liberty, South Carolina
C. G. Rodriguez, 186 Fernandez Juncos Ave., Santurce, Puerto Rico
Beech M. Schauer, 5324 Nakomis Ave., South, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Roy Steele, c/o H. Hamilton, Toponos, Colorado
Lou Sussman, 1826 S. Avers Ave., Chicago, Illinois
Arthur Votour, 216 Watson St., West Saint John, N. B., Canada
LeRoy Walters, Co. 535 CCC, Camp Mammoth, YNP-1, Yellowstone Park, Wyoming
Spain J. Wu, G. P. O., Box 1145, Hong Kong, China
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James Hanover,

SHORT STORIES,

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